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The poems in this volume have been selected from the books of verse entitled:

The Testimony of the Suns
A Wine of Wizardry
The House of Orchids
Beyond the Breakers
The Caged Eagle
Sails and Mirage

and from the dramatic poems:

Lilith
Rosamund
Truth

These volumes are published by A. M. Robertson, San Francisco, California.

SELECTED POEMS

BY

GEORGE STERLING

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To
LAWRENCE LENDA

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SELECTED POEMS

MIRAGE

I well remember that the year was old—
A time of fallen leaves and wings departing.
Beside our western sea the grass was starting,
And willow buds were eager to unfold.

But all that day the shadowed paths were wet,
As tho in cloud had come the waiting vision,
And on the sunset altars of transition
Awhile that mournfulness and beauty met.

Long gone the night that held my deathless dream—
Its vanished rain long given to the roses;
But tho I sleep, no other night discloses
The Three who shone by that delaying Stream.

One was called Evening for her slow caress,
And one called Peace because her eyes were tender,
(Softly she came, most innocent and slender),
And one called Heart-ache for her loveliness.

They were of slumber and mirage's sky—
  Frailties of vision, an august illusion,
  Living a little by the soul's inclusion,
Living in memory as long as I.

Yet did they make the burning stars seem clods—
  Those shadows of illusion, passing slowly;
  For on each face a Light fell sad and holy
From tracts I dreamt forbidden save to gods.

A little while, a little while they gleamed,
  Who were not, are not, yet shall haunt me ever,
  Mingling the sorrow of the Once and Never,
To glorify the dream of him that dreamed.

I shall not know them other than they are,
  Who find on paths that memory retraces
  The immortal, mournful beauty of those faces
That haunting, hold me exile of their star.

THE FIRST FOOD

Mother, in some sad evening long ago,
From your young breast my groping lips were taken,
Their hunger stilled, so soon again to waken,
But nevermore that holy food to know.

Ah! nevermore! for all the child might crave!
Ah! nevermore! through years unkind and dreary!
Often of other fare my lips are weary,
Unwearied once of what your bosom gave.

(Poor wordless mouth that could not speak your name!
At what unhappy revels has it eaten
The viands that no memory can sweeten,—
The banquet found eternally the same!)

Then fell a shadow first on you and me,
And tendrils broke that held us two how dearly!
Once infinitely yours, then hourly, yearly,
Less yours, as less the worthy yours to be.

(O mouth that yet should kiss the mouth of Sin!
  Were lies so sweet, now bitter to remember?
  Slow sinks the flame unfaithful to an ember;
New beauty fades and passion's wine is thin.)

How poor an end of that solicitude
  And all the love I had not from another!
  Peace to your dear, forgiving heart, O Mother,
Who gave the dear and unremembered food!

THE LOST NYMPH

Now whither hast thou flown?
  In what retreat art hid?—
Where falling waters moan
  In shadow, or amid
The rushes of the river, pebble-sown?

'Twas but a breath ago
  I held thy captive hands.
Clearly thy footprints show
  Along the final sands.
Almost I hear thy voice, divinely low.

I do but know thy feet
  Have gone from me—not why.
I do but know them fleet
  As clouds upon the sky.
Ah! gone so soon, whom love hath found so sweet!

Thy loveliness made sure
  Thou wouldst be fled ere long.
No beauty shall endure
  Beyond its shrining song—
However close, however strange and pure.

Afar thy pathway leads,
  Yet will I follow fast,
Hoping, tho day recedes,
  To find thy home at last
And silver of thee 'mid the golden reeds.

THE QUEEN FORGETS

What came before and afterward
(She said) I do not know;
But I remember well a night
In a life long ago.

What spoil was I of Egypt sacked?
Of what old war the pledge?
Around my tent whose army lay,
At the great desert's edge?

A maiden, or a Satrap's wife,
A slave or queen was I
Who saw that night the steady stars
Go down the living sky?

And saw against the heavenly ranks
How one stood watch and ward.
Black on the stars he stood, and leaned
On a cross-hilted sword.

There was no sound in all the camp
  But when a stallion neighed . . . .
I saw the light of Sirius
  On the cold blade.

Downward, above a single palm,
  Slowly the great star crept;
More motionless my sentry stood,
  As silently I wept.

What wrath had Libya for my loss?
  In Syria what tears?
What king or swineherd cursed his god
  In those forgotten years?

The tale is not in tapestry;
  The grey monks do not know . . . .
Only its shadow touches me
  From out the long ago.

Of terror and of tenderness
  Is that far vigil made,
And the green light of Sirius
  On the chill blade.

THE MASTER-MARINER

My grandsire sailed three years from home,
  And slew unmoved the sounding whale:
Here on a windless beach I roam
  And watch far out the hardy sail.

The lions of the surf that cry
  Upon this lion-colored shore
On reefs of midnight met his eye:
  He knew their fangs as I their roar.

My grandsire sailed uncharted seas,
  And toll of all their leagues he took:
I scan the shallow bays at ease,
  And tell their colors in a book.

The anchor-chains his music made
  And wind in shrouds and running-gear:
The thrush at dawn beguiles my glade,
  And once, 'tis said, I woke to hear.

My grandsire in his ample fist
  The long harpoon upheld to men:
Behold obedient to my wrist
  A grey gull's-feather for my pen!

Upon my grandsire's leathern cheek
  Five zones their bitter bronze had set:
Some day their hazards I will seek,
  I promise me at times. Not yet.

I think my grandsire now would turn
  A mild but speculative eye
On me, my pen and its concern,
  Then gaze again to sea—and sigh.

AUTUMN

Now droops the troubled year
And now her tiny sunset stains the leaf.
A holy fear,
A rapt, elusive grief,
Make imminent the swift, exalting tear.

The long wind's weary sigh—
Knowest, O listener! for what it wakes?
Adown the sky
What star of Time forsakes
Her pinnacle? What dream and dreamer die?

A presence half-divine
Stands at the threshold, ready to depart
Without a sign.
Now seems the world's deep heart
About to break. What sorrow stirs in mine?

A mist of twilight rain
Hides now the orange edges of the day.
In vain, in vain
We labor that thou stay,
Beauty who wast, and shalt not be again!

My mother the queen is dead.
  My father the king is old.
  He fumbles his cirque of gold
And dreams of a year long fled.
The young men stare at my face,
  But cannot meet my glance—
  Cavan tall as a lance,
Orra swift in the race.

Death was ever my price,
  Since my maidenhood began:
  At the thought of a Gaelic man
My heart is sister of ice.
'T is another for whom I wait,
  Tho I have not kissed his sword:
  He or none is my lord,
Though our night be soon or late.

The star grows great in my breast:
  It is crying clearly now
  To the star on the burnished prow
Of his galley far in the West.

The capes of the North are dim,
  And the windward beaches smoke,
  Where the last long roller spoke
The tidings it held of him.

Sorrow I know he brings,
  Battle, despair and change,—
  Beauty cruel and strange,
And the shed bright blood of kings.
Breast, be white for his sake!
  Mouth, be red for the kiss!
  Soul, be strong for your bliss!
Heart, be ready to break!

THE ASHES IN THE SEA

NORA MAY FRENCH

1907

Whither, with blue and pleading eyes,—
  Whither, with cheeks that held the light
Of winter's dawn on cloudless skies,
    Evadne, was thy flight?

Such as a sister's was thy brow;
  Thy hair seemed fallen from the moon—
Part of its radiance, as now
    Of shifting tide and dune. —

Did Autumn's grieving lure thee hence,
  Or silence ultimate beguile?
Ever our things of consequence
    Awakened but thy smile.

Is it with thee that ocean takes
  A stranger sorrow to its tone?
With thee the star of evening wakes
    More beautiful, more lone?

For wave and hill and sky betray
A subtle tinge and touch of thee;
Thy shadow lingers in the day,
Thy voice in winds to be.

Beauty—hast thou discovered her
By deeper seas no moons control?
What stars have magic now to stir
Thy swift and wilful soul?

Or may thy heart no more forget
The grievous world that once was home,
That here, where love awaits thee yet,
Thou seemest yet to roam?

For most, far-wandering, I guess
Thy witchery on the haunted mind,
In valleys of thy loneliness,
Made clean with ocean's wind.

And most thy presence here seems told,
The waif of elemental deeps,
When, at its vigils unconsoled,
Some night of winter weeps.

THE VOICE OF THE DOVE

Hear I the mourning-dove,
As now the swallow floats
Low o'er the shadowed oats?
Soft as the voice of love,
Hear I her slow and supplicating notes?

O fugitive! O lone!
O burden pure and strong
That summer noons prolong!
O link in music shown
Between the silence and an angel's song!

The dulcimer and lute
Hoard not so swoonless woe.
What grief of long ago
Would now thy tones transmute
To what we sought afar and could not know?

Thy yearnings yet elude
Our quest and scrutiny,
Tho mortals echo thee
Thy moan in solitude
For dreams that are not nor shall ever be.

So broken waters hold
A voice to sorrow set,—
A world's foreknown regret,
Immutable, untold.
So seas remember, tho our souls forget.

SPRING IN CARMEL

O'er Carmel fields in the springtime the sea-gulls
follow the plow.
White, white wings on the blue above!
White were your brow and breast, O Love!
But I cannot see you now.
Tireless ever the Mission swallow
Dips to meadow and poppied hollow;
Well for her mate that he can follow,
As the buds are on the bough.

By the woods and waters of Carmel the lark is
glad in the sun.
Harrow! harrow! music of God!
Near to your nest her feet have trod,
Whose journeyings are done.
Sing, O lover! I cannot sing.
Wild and sad are the thoughts you bring.
Well for you are the skies of spring,
And to me all skies are one.

In the beautiful woods of Carmel an iris bends to
the wind.

O thou far-off and sorrowful flower!
Rose that I found in a tragic hour!
  Rose that I shall not find!
Petals that fell so soft and slowly,
Fragrant snows on the grasses lowly,
Gathered now would I call you holy
  Ever to eyes once blind.

In the pine-sweet valley of Carmel the cream-cups
      scatter in foam.
Azures of early lupin there!
Now the wild lilac floods the air
  Like a broken honey-comb.
So could the flowers of Paradise
Pour their souls to the morning skies;
So like a ghost your fragrance lies
  On the path that once led home.

On the emerald hills of Carmel the spring and
      winter have met.
Here I find in a gentled spot
The frost of the wild forget-me-not,
  And—I cannot forget.

Heart once light as the floating feather
Borne aloft in the sunny weather,
Spring and winter have come together—
  Shall you and she meet yet?

On the rocks and beaches of Carmel the surf is
      mighty to-day.
Breaker and lifting billow call
To the high, blue Silence over all
  With the word no heart can say.
Time-to-be, shall I hear it ever?
Time-that-is, with the hands that sever,
Cry all words but the dreadful "Never!"
  And name of her far away!

AUTUMN IN CARMEL

Now with a sigh November comes to the brooding land.
Yellowing now toward winter the willows of Carmel stand.
Under the pine her needles lie redder with the rain.
Gipsy birds from the northland visit our woods again.

Hunters wait on the hillside, watching the plowman pass
And the red hawk's shadow gliding over the newborn grass.
Purple and white the sea-gulls swarm at the river-mouth.
Pearl of mutable heavens towers upon the south.

Westward pine and cypress stand in a sadder light.
Flocks of the veering curlew flash for an instant white,

Wreaths of the mallard, shifting, melt on the vacant blue.
Over the hard horizon dreams are calling anew.

Dumb with the sense of wonder hidden from hand and eye,—
Wistful yet for the Secret ocean and earth deny,—
Baffled for Beauty's haunting, hearts are peaceless to-day,
Seeing the dusk of sapphire deepen within the bay.

Far on the kelp the heron stands for awhile at rest.
The lichen-colored breaker hollows a leaning breast.
Desolate, hard and tawny, the sands lie clean and wide,
Dry with the wafted sea-wind, wet with the fallen tide.

Early the autumn sunset tinges to mauve the foam;
Shyly the rabbit, feeding, crosses the road to home.

Daylight, lingering golden, touches the tallest tree,
Ere the rain, like silver harp-strings, comes slanting in from sea.

DIRGE

FROM "LILITH"

O lay her gently where the lark is nesting
And wingéd things are glad!
Tears end, and now begins the time of resting
For her whose heart was sad.

Give roses, but a fairer bloom is taken.
Strew lilies—she was one,
Gone in her silence to a place forsaken
By roses and the sun.

Deep is her slumber at the last of sorrow,
Of twilight and the rain.
Her eyes have closed forever on to-morrow
And on to-morrow's pain.

Often I long, in cities wrung by care,
Awhile in ancient solitudes to sink,
And stand delaying at a rillet's brink.
The pilgrim hears but woodland murmurs there,
And water falling with a sound like prayer
In hidden pools where only thrushes drink,
The singing silver joining, link by link,
Their shadowed crystal, pure as ocean air.

Hold cool your canyons, O eternal hills!
For where the voices are not I would be,
Led to your heart by those betraying rills.
Happy, tho for a little, that release,
In twilights where old memories summon me
To drain the lonely chalice of your peace.

In Hell a voice awoke,
And slowly spoke.

"Not for God's vengeance met,
Not for my torment-sweat,
Not for these agonies
Break I our silences:
Behold their pain excelled
By rapture once unheld.

In Earth's benignest land
We wandered hand in hand.
All beauty and all woe
Were hers awhile to know;
All griefs were given her,
And I sole comforter.
Slowly her love awoke
And like a lily broke;
But ah! to me more dear
The roses of the year,
And I would wander far

Below the crimson star.
Slow as the jasmine grows
I won her from her snows,
Telling with word and deed
My hunger and her need,
Till, all the stream unbarred,
Her blood flowed passionward.
Awhile she recked of shame,
And spoke her Saviour's name:
Awhile her saints did call,
Then promised all.

That night there could not be
The Bliss for her and me;
But soon her lord must go
Beyond the flooded Po;
And soon, in steel arrayed
Went forth his cavalcade;
Then turned my Sweet to me
Telling when all could be—
Ah! God of hate! who heard
Her swiftly spoken word?

'Mid unseen flowers a-bloom
We came across the gloom,
But in that garden-close
Was dark, O Death! thy rose;
And ere mad lips caressed
Or breast was hurled to breast,—
Ere broke her last appeal,
I felt his bravos' steel—
O stealthy hounds that crept
Where the low fountains wept!

So fell the eternal night
Upon our lost delight,
And where its horror lies
I think of Paradise;
Yet not as they that crave
The coolness of its wave—
Sweeter than all therein
The sin we could not sin!
Yea! tho infernal art
Goad the remorseful heart,
Till primacies of pain
Within this bosom reign,

First of their legion, first,
Is that unsated thirst!—
The pang of lips unkissed,
The rack of raptures missed!"

Then on that fury fell
The silences of Hell.

IN THE MARKET-PLACE

Rev. xviii: 10-13.

In Babylon, high Babylon,
What gear is bought and sold?
All merchandise beneath the sun
That bartered is for gold:
Amber and oils from far beyond
The desert and the fen,
And wines whereof our throats are fond—
Yea! and the souls of men!

In Babylon, grey Babylon,
What goods are sold and bought?
Vesture of linen subtly spun,
And cups from agate wrought;
Raiment of many-colored silk
For some fair denizen,
And ivory more white than milk–
Yea! and the souls of men!

In Babylon, old Babylon,
What cargoes on the piers?

Pearls from a tepid ocean won,
  And gems that are as tears;
Arrows and javelins that prevail
  Against the lion's den,
And brazen chariots and mail—
  Yea! and the souls of men!

In Babylon, mad Babylon,
  What get you for your pence?
A moiety of cinnamon,
  Of flour and frankincense;
But let the shekels in your keep
  Be multiplied by ten,
And you shall purchase slaves and sheep—
  Yea! and the souls of men!

In Babylon, sad Babylon,
  What chattels shall invite?
A wife whenas your youth is done,
  Or leman for a night.
Before Astarte's portico
  The torches flare again;
The shadows come, the shadows go—
  Yea, and the souls of men!

In Babylon, dark Babylon,
  Who take the wage of shame?
The scribe and singer, one by one,
  That toil for gold and fame.
They grovel to their masters' mood;
  The blood upon the pen
Assigns their souls to servitude—
  Yea! and the souls of men!

WILLY PITCHER

Sharon, Conn.

He is forgotten now,
And humble dust these thirty years and more—
He whose young eyes and beautiful wide brow
My thoughts alone restore.

Dead, and his kindred dead!
And none remembers in that quiet place
The slender form, the brown and faunlike head,
The wildly wistful face.

And yet across the years
I see us roam among the apple-trees,
Telling our tale of boyish hopes and fears
Amid the hurried bees.

When I am all alone
By the eternal beauty of the sea,
Or where the mountain's eastern shade is thrown,
His face comes back to me—

A memory unsought,—
A ghost entreating, and I know not why,—
A presence that the restless winds of thought
Acknowledge with a sigh;

Till I am half content
Not any more the loneliness to know
Of him who died so young and innocent,
And ah! so long ago!

In the silence of a midnight lost, lost forevermore,
I stood upon a nameless beach where none had been before,
And red gold and yellow gold were the shells upon that shore.

Lone, lone it was as a mist-enfolded strand
Set round a lake where marble demons stand—
Held like a sapphire-stone in Thibet's monstrous hand.

And there I beheld how One stood in her grace
To hold to the stars her wet and faery face,
And on the smooth and haunted sands her footfall had no trace.

White, white was she as the youngest seraph's word,
Or milk of Eden's kine or Eden's fragrant curd,
Cast in love by Eve's wan hand to her most snowy bird.

Fair, fair was she as Venus of the sky,
And the jasmine of her breast and starlight of her eye
Made the heart a pain and the soul a hopeless sigh.

Weak with the sight I leaned upon my sword,
Till my soul that had sighed was become an unseen chord
For stress of music rendered to unknown things adored.

Surely she heard, but her beauty gave no sign
To me for whom the hushéd sea was odorous as wine,—
To me for whom the voiceless world was made her silent shrine.

And she sent forth her gaze to the waters of the West,
And she sent forth her soul to the Islands of the Blest,
Below a star whose silver throes set pearls upon her breast.

But chill in the East broke a glory on the lands,
And she moaned like some low wave that dies on frozen sands,
And held to her sea-lover her sweet and cruel hands.

Then rose the moon, and its lance was in her side,
And there was bitter music because in woe she cried,
Ere on the hard and gleaming beach she laid her down and died.

I leapt to her succor, my sword I left behind;
But one low mound of opal foam was all that I could find—
A moon-washed length of airy gems that trembled in the wind.

I knelt below the stars; the sea put forth a wave;
The moon drew up the captive tides upon her shining grave,
As far away I heard the cry her dim sea-lover gave.

THE LAST DAYS

The russet leaves of the sycamore
Lie at last on the valley floor—
By the autumn wind swept to and fro
Like ghosts in a tale of long ago.
Shallow and clear the Carmel glides
Where the willows droop on its vine-walled sides.

The bracken-rust is red on the hill;
The pines stand brooding, somber and still;
Grey are the cliffs, and the waters grey,
Where the seagulls dip to the sea-born spray.
Sad November, lady of rain,
Sends the goose-wedge over again.

Wilder now, for the verdure's birth,
Falls the sunlight over the earth;
Killdees call from the fields where now
The banding blackbirds follow the plow;
Rustling poplar and brittle weed
Whisper low to the river-reed.

Days departing linger and sigh;
Stars come soon to the quiet sky;
Buried voices, intimate, strange,
Cry to body and soul of Change;
Beauty, eternal fugitive,
Seeks the home that we cannot give.

FATHER COYOTE

At twilight time, when the lamps are lit,
Father coyote comes to sit
At the chaparral's edge, on the mountain-side—
Comes to listen and to deride
The rancher's hound and the rancher's son,
The passer-by and everyone.
And we pause at milking-time to hear
His reckless carolling, shrill and clear,—
His terse and swift and valorous troll,
Ribald, rollicking, scornful, droll,
As one might sing in coyotedom:
"Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!"

Yet well I wot there is little ease
Where the turkeys roost in the almond trees,
But mute forebodings, canny and grim,
As they shift and shiver along the limb.
And the dog flings back an answer brief
(Curse o' the honest man on the thief),
And the cat, till now intent to rove,
Stalks to her lair by the kitchen stove;

Not that *she* fears the rogue on the hill;
But—no mice remain, and—the night is chill.
And now, like a watchman of the skies,
Whose glance to a thousand valleys flies,
The moon glares over the granite ledge—
Pared a slice on its upper edge.
And father coyote waits no more,
Knowing that down on the valley floor,
In a sandy nook all cool and white,
The rabbits play and the rabbits fight,
Flopping, nimble, skurrying,
Careless now with the surge of Spring. . . .
Furry lover, alack! alas!
Skims your fate o'er the moonlit grass!

Alcon, the wood-god, wandering his realm,
Found his son Astries in the meadowland
At sunset, squatted on a fallen pine
And much intent upon a swarm of gnats.
To whom the godling: "Father, I have stayed
This hour to wonder at yon tiny folk,
Who dart, and hum, and make so much ado,
Mad with the sunlight. What it is they seek
And whom they praise, and why, I do not know;
But as the hour grows old, and twilight hills
Put on the purple, this I see—that they
With wilder zeal do dash this way and that,
And where each in a foot of space had range,
Now flits he two, and shriller grows the cry,
Larger the host, and greater its concern.
Dost note?" Whereat brown Alcon plucked a root
And beat it on the pine, and briefly spake:
"Aye! aye! they call it 'Progress'!" And the sun
Sank on the forest, and the night was chill.

CONSPIRACY

I had a dream of some great house of stone,
Not dark, but open to the northern ray.
Beneath a cold and somber sky it lay,
Soundless and secret, mournful and alone.

It had no prospect save upon the sky—
Set in a great and old and windy wood.
Profound its essence seemed, but not of good;
Yet had one asked, none could have answered why.

A single door it had, that faced the east,
Ponderous, brazen and without a lock.
I thought, as stubbornly I dared to knock,
That past the sill a cryptic murmur ceased.

And none said "Enter!" yet I entered there,
And saw that house was all one marble room,
Austere, and given to the dead, for whom
The wall held chiseled couches, scant and bare.

Arctic, immense, no pillar stayed that hall,
And from the north the melancholy light
Sank through translucent windows, vast and white,
On alabaster niche and frozen pall.

Rigid they lay, that session of the dead,
From whom the hands of Change seemed held a space,
With folded arms and enigmatic face,
Marmorean, as portion of their bed.

And half I thought that wafts of presence stole
On the urned air significantly still,
Upon whose wintry crystal crept a chill
That fell not on the body but the soul.

That air unused, it seemed to crave escape
From that sad hall, to be a wind again.
I felt a terror of those tranquil men,
And feared the wisdom of each silent shape.

Whereat I turned, importunate, to win
My way to life's complacencies once more;
Which done, behind the safety of the door
Again I heard that muttering begin.

IN AUTUMN

Mine eyes fill, and I know not why at all.
Lies there a country not of time and space—
Some fair and irrecoverable place
I roamed ere birth and cannot now recall?—
A land where petals fall
On paths that I shall nevermore retrace?

Something is lacking from the wistful bow'rs,
And I have lost that which I never had.
The sea cries, and the heavens and sea are sad,
And Love goes desolate, yet is not ours.
Brown Earth alone is glad,
Robing her breast with fallen leaves and flow'rs.

High memories stir; the spirit's feet are slow,
In nameless fields where tears alone are fruit,
And voices of the wind alone transmute
The music that I lost so long ago.
I stand irresolute,
Lonely for some one I shall never know.

SAUL

"And they put his armor in the house of Ashtoreth."—*I Samuel, xxxi, 10.*

Weep for the one so strong to slay, whom One has taken at last!
Mourn for the mail that rings no more and the ruin unforecast!
This was he of the flaming heart and the deep, heroic breath,
Whose sword is laid and his armor hung in the House of Ashtoreth.

Weep for the one so swift to slay, whose knees have bent to the night!
Dust is thick on his thresholds now, tho trumpets call to the fight.
Slinger and bowman gather fast, but our strong man does not come.
Captains long for his counsels now, but the sated lips are dumb.

Cry his name in the citadel, sending the runners forth:

The South gives back no rumor of him; in vain
they question the North.
Seek him not where the wall is held or the spears
go in to death,
Whose shield is laid and his armor hung in the
House of Ashtoreth.

This was he grown mighty in war, but her war is
otherwise:
Swords that flash from her bosom bared, arrows
cast from her eyes.
Who shall stoop from her javelin thrown, who
from her singing dart?
Her sudden shaft is hot in his loins, her steel in
his maddened heart.

Deep in the still and altared dusk her lamp glows
small and red,
Mirrored clear in the great cuirass, like the
rubies of her bed;
Blood of light on his burnished helm, on the belt
and the greaves, one saith
Whose spear is laid and his armor hung in the
House of Ashtoreth.

Tho Gath go up to the threshing-floors, or hosts assemble at Tyre,
Wait no more for your prince's word, who has taken his desire.
Cities and fields and given hearts, honor and life were weighed,
The balance shown and the end foreseen and the deep decision made.

Weep for the one so strong in war, whose war is now of the Dark!
Well he harnessed his breast with steel, but her arrows find their mark.
Her hands have loosened the brazen belt and her breath has found his breath
Whose sword is laid and his armor hung in the House of Ashtoreth.

A LOST GARDEN

Under November skies,
In lovely ruin lies
A garden, long deserted by the birds.
The lacquered gold of old magnolia leaves
Gleams on its hidden lawn
Like sweet, forgotten words.
Here a lone poplar, slender-shafted, grieves,
An hour before the dawn.

Tranquil the sunlight falls
As afternoon recalls
The clime that summer's vanished feet have crossed.
A memory's lily flashes on the glance,
Like dryad-silver seen
For but a breath, then lost
Far down the western vistas of romance,
In forests old and green.

Here lies a reedless pool,
Mysterious and cool,

Within whose breast, like a remembered sin
A mirrored flower casts her scarlet moon.
Silent the bloom above,
Silent the bloom within,
As lovers fearful lest they tell too soon
Their sorrow and their love.

Dusk has a gentler grace
Within this quiet place,
Unhaunted yet by winds that soon shall come.
The shadows meet. The world accepts the night,
The night her youngest star.
An owl, no longer dumb,
Cries hollowly. A shape beyond the sight
Responds, and from afar.

Larger for her delay,
Slow on the path of day,
The moon gives softly of her phantom gold.
The pool, untroubled yet, receives the lure—
Fain of that fleeting gift,
Ungatherable, cold,
Ancient, and as the snows of winter pure,
Caught in the glacier's rift.

Upon the morning sky
The nameless clouds go by,
Flower of the heavens and their unchanging dream,
Fled in an hour and in an hour renewed.
On ways untrod they soar
Whose fallen shadows stream
On paths of this reproachful solitude,
Where footsteps come no more.

But day or night, the spot
To things imagined not
Stirs mournfully, as eddying, the leaf
Sinks earthward to the wind's autumnal moan.
Here, tho no word be said,
One finds, in twilights brief,
A presence and its whisper, still unknown
And still uncomforted.

So shall it be till spring
Return, and linnets sing
On dawns too delicate for other sound,
And eves aeolian with the harps of rain,—

Till Earth again confess
Her dreaming heart has found
The beautiful Illusion and its pain,
So rich in happiness.

THE GLASS OF TIME

I know a lake high up among the hills—
A pure tranquillity where shadows rest,
Accepting to its melancholy breast
The silver-throated rills.

A solitary killdee, running fleet,
(The one unquiet thing that meets the sight)
Slips like a bead along the thread of light
Where land and water meet.

Silent around the forest ramparts press,
Walling with emerald its quietude,
Ere Evening and her mystery o'erbrood
That hush and holiness.

There secretly the large-eyed stag is found,
And there at dawn the stealing mist that finds
Upon its arras the delaying winds,
Too ghostly for a sound.

Morning, with distant voices in the wood,
Shortens the shadows, hour by fragrant hour.
Voiceless awhile, the redwood sentries tow'r
Where once their fathers stood.

Lucid, serene, untroubled by a wind,
The noonday crystal slumbers, cool and deep,
Calm as the features of a nun asleep,
Whom not a dream shall find.

Elusively, a sense of things unheard
Awakes, and is forgotten as it dies.
The afternoon is great with peace. Then cries,
Far off, and once, a bird.

The slow-winged clouds pass in unhast'ning flight
To some far haven of Hesperian ease,
Paving that court of chill translucencies
With alabaster light.

Therein, as in her sky, the moon shall melt,
The stars find sanctuary for a space,
Till morning, uncompassionate, efface
The palace where they dwelt.

There if one come, he fills that placid glass
With azure glory of the mirrored sky.
Fading, the vision and the glory die
With him whose footsteps pass. . . .

Lake of the spirit, even so shall cease
(A pale mirage in heavens profound and far)
The face of Beauty, passing like a star
From peace to vaster peace.

SAILS

In the growing haste of the world must this thing be:
The passing of sails forever from the sea?
Fewer always the sails go out to the West;
More and huger the steamers howl to the star—
Trailing their smoke afar,
Staining the deep and the heavens' patient breast.
Mighty are these we have tamed—
Giants electric, monsters of gas and of steam,
Titans unknown tho named.
But oh! for a younger sea and the sails' glad gleam,
And the clean horizon's call
And the Powers of the air man never shall tame at all!
Was it not well with the world
And well with the heart,
When ships went forth to lands untraced on a chart?—
When the dauntless wings were furled
In wonderful havens, virgin then of a mast,

At islands without a past,
Girt around with an alien ocean's foam,
Over the world from home?

O mariners! Sea-lords of a stranger blue!
Kings of the planet's sapphire morning! You
That had Mystery for loot!
Serfs of a sharp unrest that asked no curing
But that of golden and dragon-guarded fruit,
Where, past the sky-line luring,
The dim Hesperides
Echoed like purple shells the sirened seas!
A vestige of your kingdom lies in light
Where a lone sail goes out against the night.
O path on which the fleets of the world were led!
Changing, changeless road of marvel and death,—
Of songless birds o'er meadows that none shall tread!
Of empire gone in a breath
As the keels of the quick descend to the keels of the dead
In havens lightless and blind!

In the hurry of things shall the sails depart from thee—

They, kin to the clouds of the sea,
And driven even as clouds by the harborless wind?
For I dream of the wonderful wings
Of the old Phœnician quest
Deeper and deeper into the mystical West,—
Of forgotten ocean-kings,
When the galley wandered forth,
And the sail shone white on the cold horizon-line,
Like an iceberg's peak that lifted far in the North.
For I dream of the purple brine
And the blazoned pomp of the saint on the galleon's van,
As, dark from the deep, the sails of Raleigh or Drake
On the gold of morning ran.
For I dream of battles entered for England's sake,
And Nelson's high war-frigates with canvas taut
Above the thunder of cannon, the world at stake,
And the world with death well-bought.

* * *

Splendid now on my dream
The snows of the clipper gleam,
Towers of marble, glorious, tall in the sun—
Hurling south to the hurricanes of the Horn.
O pinions, wrenched and torn
By the north Atlantic's breath,
On homing whalers, three years' cruising done.
(Captain! captain! what of the seas of Death?)
O colored sails of the little fishing-boats,
From a thousand turquoise harbors venturing,
Under the tropic day!
Grey canvases that bring
The shapely sealers to San Francisco Bay,
Where the steel-walled cruiser floats.
But I hear a naiad sing,
And softer now in my vision the vans of silk
Glimmer on eastern shallops, by dusk adrift
On waters of legend; and webs as white as milk
Are wafting a murdered queen to her island tomb,
Where the cypress columns lift.
And ghostly now on the gloom
The shrouded spars of the Flying Dutchman go
To harbors that none shall know;

Foamless the ripples of her passing die
Across the dark, and then from the dark, a cry!

O light of the sea-solitude! O sails!
Must you pass even so
To the realms of fantasy and the olden tales?
Ports of oblivion, hidden far from the sun,
At your anchorage shall every one be furled,
These wings of man's adventure around the world—
Like the old beauties dying, one by one?
Ever the clouds return: shall these come back
On the wind's uncharted track—
Braving again the deep's immortal wrath?
O wings of man's adventure in old years!
Here at an ocean's brink
Whence the great, increasing quest
On the everlasting path
Draws yet the heart and the hand to the sea's frontiers
And spaces scornful of rest,
Under the night's first star I watch you sink,
In the world's twilight fading, fading West.

Up to the House of Mammon, from dawn to sister dawn,
Called by remembered voices the sons of men are drawn;
By noon the dust goes skyward, by night the torches flare,
On veining roads that mingle—and you and I are there.

Around the House of Mammon, like ruined cities' stones,
The stubborn and the haughty have left their trampled bones.
They were the few in number that would not enter in,
Saying, "The god is evil." Saying, "To kneel is sin."

The ebony House of Mammon goes up against the sky;
The north wind and the south wind before its portals die.

Its towers go near to Heaven, its vaults go nearer Hell,
And all are fat with favor to some who serve them well.

Before the House of Mammon stand you not overlong,
But enter to the worship, unnoted in the throng;
There it is ill to parley, to ask the why or when,
For he whose line would prosper shall be as other men.

Within the House of Mammon august the twilights are,
Across whose gulf the portal gleams smaller than a star.
The bucklers of the mighty in rust and ruin melt,
Above those deep foundations where king and pontiff knelt.

Within the House of Mammon low thunder of loud pray'rs
Rolls from the burdened pavement and coiled, colossal stairs—

Petition and obeisance, when each makes known his need,
Begging the flamens hearken, begging the largess speed.

Within the House of Mammon his priesthood stands alert,
By mysteries attended, by dusk and splendors girt,
Knowing, for faiths departed, his own shall still endure,
And they be found his chosen, untroubled, solemn, sure.

Within the House of Mammon the golden altar lifts
Where dragon-lamps are shrouded as costly incense drifts—
A dust of old ideals, now fragrant from the coals,
To tell of hopes long ended, to tell the death of souls.

Within the House of Mammon there is no need of song,

And faced by them who doubt not, no doubt endures for long;
Tho twilight hold the temple, there yet each one shall see
The Word of Words, the letters that spell "Necessity."

Beyond the House of Mammon there is no need to go,
And other fanes are shadow whose figments melt and flow.
Grown weary of the service, no scoffer long derides,
For past the veils and darkness a very god abides. . . .

Above the House of Mammon the hours and ages tread,
Nor find the ramparts shaken nor see the sentrics fled,
Till o'er the massy columns, broken like those of Tyre,
The long-awaited Morning go winged with crystal fire.

ATTHAN DANCES

FROM "TRUTH"

The silver of the lyre
  Cries, and your silver feet
  Like living flowers repeat
Your body's silver fire.

What scents without a name
  Within your tresses hide?
  What perfect roses died
To give your mouth its flame?

Your hands, uplifting, float
  More delicate than Love's.
  Your breasts are two white doves
Whose moan is in your throat.

As lyre and cithern swoon,
You linger, in your pace
  The panther's gift of grace,
Who glides below the moon.

O linger where I sigh
  Above the golden wine,
  And touch your mouth to mine—
A scarlet butterfly.

Hidden from all it lies
But the revealing skies,
Whose highest star is lamp and warden here.
The leopards of the palace prowl not near,
And foiled are cruel eyes.

Marble has walled around
The myrtle-given ground,
And cypress-tow'rs dismay the song of birds,
Where two find now the needlessness of words,
And two alone are found.

In dream or reverie,
Beyond the wood they see
The wind's wan hand, admitted or withdrawn,
Stirring the golden arras of the dawn
Or dusk's red tapestry.

Where the wind sorroweth
It strews with drifting breath
The snow of petals or their cool turquoise.
Beauty that leaves the heart but tears for voice
Has refuge here—and death.

Whether the brown bees hum,
Or leaf and lip are dumb,
The passion told is told beyond recall,
The silence made an answer unto all,
Where two alone may come.

Love hears in this domain
The moan born not of pain.
The roses of the bower and the face,
The scarlet of the flow'r and the embrace,
Are brief, but not in vain.

But whatso word love say,
No word of love can stay
The long delight whose music is a sigh.
The rapture and the beauty soon to die
No clinging hands delay.

For whether midnight moon
Or light of afternoon
Weave silently the shadows of the flow'rs,
Too soon is come an ending of the hours,
And parting come too soon.

Has the wind called you sister?
Sister to Kypris, who, as the far foam kissed her,
Rose exquisite and white.
For seeing you, we dream of all swift things
And of the swallow's flight,—
Of sea-birds drifting on untroubled wings,
And incense swaying at the shrine of kings,
In gossamers of violescent light.
In what Sicilian meadows, cool with dew,
Ran rosier girls than you,
With tresses dancing free,
To tell how beautiful the world might be?
In what high days unborn,
Will sheerer loveliness go forth at morn,
To wave a brief farewell to night's last star?
For you, we envy not the lost and far,
As now you make our day
As happy and imperial as they.

More than the ripple of grass and waters flowing,—

More than the panther's grace
Or lily moved by winds from sunset blowing,
Your limbs in rapture trace
An evanescent pattern on the sight—
Beauty that lives an instant, to become
A sister beauty and a new delight.
So full you feed the heart that hearts are dumb.
Those little hands set back the hands of time,
Till we remember what the world has dreamed,
In her own clime,
Of Beauty, and her tides that ebb and flow
Around old islands where her face has gleamed,
The marvellous mirage of long ago.

Ah! more than voice hath said
They speak of revels fled—
The alabastine and exultant thighs,
The vine-encircled head,
The rose-face lifted, lyric, to the skies,
The loins by leaping roses garlanded.
The sandaled years return,
The lamps of Eros burn,

The flowers of Circe nod,
And one may dream of other days and lands,
Of other girls that touch unresting hands—
Sad sirens of the god,
To some forgotten tune
Swaying their silvern hips below the moon.
Dance on, for dreams they are indeed,
A vision set afar,
But you with warm, immediate beauty plead,
And fragrant is your footfall on our star.

O flesh made music in its ecstasy,
Sing to us ere an end of song shall be!
O fair things young and fleet!
White flower of floating feet!
Be glad! Be glad! for happiness is holy!
Be glad awhile, for on the greensward slowly
Summer and autumn pass,
With shadows on the grass,
Till in the meadow lowly
November's tawny reeds shall sigh "Alas!"
Dear eyes,
What see you on the azure of the skies?

Enchanted, eager face,
Seek you young Love in his eternal place?
Round arms upflung, what is it you would clasp—
What far-off lover?
Hands that a moment hover,
What hands unseen evade awhile your grasp?
Ah! that is best: to seek but not to find him;
For found and loved the seasons yet will blind him.
To this true heaven you are—
That moth unworthy of your soul's white star.
Dance on, and dream of better things than he!
Dance on, translating us the mortal's guess
At Beauty and her immortality—
Yourself your flesh-clad art and loveliness.

Dance, for the time comes when the dance is done
And feet no longer run
On paths of rapture leading from the day.
Release not now
The vine that you have bound about your brow:
Dance, granting us awhile that we forget
How morrows but delay,

Yet come as surely as their own regret.
Through you the Past is ours,
Through you the Future flow'rs,
In you their dreams and happiness are met.
Through you we find again
That birth of bliss and pain,
That thing of joy and tears and hope and laughter
That men call youth—
A greater thing than truth,
A fairer thing than fame
In songs hereafter,
A miracle, an unreturning flame,
The season for itself alone worth living,
And needing not our patience nor forgiving.

O heart that knows enough, and yet must learn
The wisdom that we spurn!
The years at last will teach you:
May now no whisper reach you
Of noons when pleading of the flutes shall cease,
And not for rapture will you beg, but peace.
To-day it seems too harsh that you should know
How soon the wreaths must go,

And those flower-mating feet
Be gathered, even as flowers, by cruel Time,
Their flashing rhyme
No more to mingle with the blood's wild beat.
Dance, with no wind to chill your perfect grace,
Nor shadow on your face,
Nor voice to call to unenduring rest
The limbs delighting and the naked breast.

Afton Annesley, gone forever,
Cold to-night are the stars above,
That see all beauty, but never, never,
One thing sweet as our woodland love.

Over our heads the pines were sighing;
Under us two their needles lay.
Then was an end to all denying:
All we feared was the break of day.

Afton Annesley, ocean calling
Echoes all of an old regret.
Sea-mist rising and twilight falling
Waken things that I half forget.

Pain tho it were, let me remember
All that met in the farewell kiss.
Tears and rain of a far November,
Equal now in the silences!

Afton Annesley, starlight only
  Lit your way to the trysting-tree.
Here I find, on the wood-path lonely,
  Futile dreams of a tryst-to-be.

Still would I seek you, past regaining,
  Grief and joy of a tragic year.
Lost Elysium! Autumn, waning,
  Murmurs all—if the heart could hear.

Strange, when the blood runs wild to-day in me,
That I but dream of the faces now so far
On the heart's horizon, near, so near, to the sea,
And setting dimly, star by fugitive star!

Now, if ever, are days when the mounting bliss
Should flood the limbs and wet with rapture the eyes:
Strange, that I dream of only a tragic kiss,
And a moon gone down forever on the skies.

April bends to her poppies dropped in flight.
O mother-month of Nature giving the breast,
With the land a pure and emerald breadth of light,
And ocean voices echoing out of the West!

The romping wind had a sort of boyishness,
Fled to tease the stranding cloud on the hill.
Never a ripple moves the water cress
In the stream, and the million-chorded pine is still.

Winter stars are gone with the winter rains,
And almond petals long since gone from the bough.
Birds begin to nest in the willow lanes.
It is faun weather again in Carmel now.

A cloud far lost on the high, eventless blue,
And a vine whose little clarions have scent
For sound, awaken the memory of you—
Mist and myrrh in a dream unhappy blent.

How many mutinous years ago to-day
Did I watch you first as you wandered over the sands?
How many pitiless miles of dust away
Do you wander now, and in what shadowy lands?

Well I remember how soon it was we stood,
When the morning wind had gathered the night's last tear,

And watched the clouds brim over the western wood,
And "There," you said, "are the snows of yesteryear."

Glad am I now that I was too glad to muse
On the snows that haunt the farther dreams of man,
But took the kiss that the Fates of to-day refuse,
And ran where you said an unseen dryad ran.

Dream you, silver dryad that once you were,
Of the wind and the sands and the sunset far away,
Of the silence fallen, that only a kiss could stir,
And the wild, golden wood-days, ever with yesterday?

Well I remember foamless reaches of sea,
Undulant, living, with shimmer of pale-blue silk;
Gazing now where the wingéd foam leaps free,
I remember your eyes, like agates bathed in milk.

Beauty's paths—was there one that we did not take,
Whether it wound by mosses of the sea
Or led our feet to valleys of sage and brake,
Where blue-jays tumbled, slim, in the buckeye tree?

Morning girdled half of a world in gold,
Gathered up in earth's melodious hours.
April walked with buds too many to hold,
Till weary bees seemed taking their time with the flowers.

Leaves, owl-brown, of a mottled sycamore,
Stirred or slumbered on drowsy river-sand.
Over the stream we watched a falcon soar,
White o' the breast, as you were white o' the hand.

Clouds of spring crept over a far-off hill,
Lingering as a broken wind grew less,
And a shadow lay like a hush made visible
Where the redwood dreamed in an emerald loneliness.

Over the tawny meadowland at noon
Hiving blackbirds surged and sank in their flight.
Under the northern shadow of the dune,
Sands were clean as the moon of day was white.

Ocean shells with tint of an autumn leaf
Lay where desolate beaches bade us roam;
And we saw the edge of the wave well over the reef,
Willow-green, till it broke to music and foam.

Sounding sapphire and billows of choral jade,
Deep and wild your song on the lucent air,
As we watched the golden reefs of sunset fade,
Ere our galleons of dream could founder there.

Mournful, mute, for the world's new loveliness,
Sad and glad with the beauty of Time and love,
We told it all in a wondering caress—
Heedless of Time and the jealous stars above.

Mute or not, of your mouth I had its word,
Softer than ear may know or a tongue impart;
And a heart-whole even-song of a hidden bird
Rose in the hush to make reply for my heart.

Paths of peace that we shall not trace again,
Where the Mariposa lily shone and waned,
And Fremont's flower blazed trail for the cyclamen!
O lily cup, and cup of our passion drained!

O ghost of fire where the wind ran grey in the grass!
Wild lilac bloom and audible rapture of bees!
Branches bent for the feet of Love to pass!
Voice of Love so low in the veiling trees!

Rapture grown too deaf to listen or heed!
Lips that cried in a music unsuppressed!
Beauty given beyond all bearing or need!
Pansy-bronze of your eyes, and apple-bloom of your breast!

O far away! do you never hearken in sleep
As I, to an ocean-echo mingled with dream,
From shore and reef of an indiscernible Deep—
A music set to a memory supreme?

Was it worth our pain, our desolation of loss?
Was it best that our lips be given to other lips?
Far on the blue the sails, ephemeral, cross.
Over the West the star, immutable, slips.

Here by the beauty and terror of the sea,
On a dune between the sapphire and the pines,
I have mused on all that your beauty meant to me,
And a final beauty that love at last divines.

I have watched for an hour the wave's deliberate grace.
I shall sit and dream of an old regret, I know,
And the touch of things inviolate in your face,
Till the granite facets take the afterglow.

Can it be that the thorns that we found at last so sharp
Saved for us then our irretrievable rose,
Tho the storm that took an ocean for its harp
Died at last on the far, foreshadowing snows?

Somehow, dumbly, out of this dark of things,
Heart and soul find words of a wiser tongue,
Somehow, blindly, take a splendor of wings,
Made of the dreams we dreamt when we were young.

Never a worthless flower the seasons find,
Nor utter night, tho shadows fall as they must.
Fresh on the brow is an ever-living wind
From a Sea of change whose foam is blossoming dust.

Surf-walls eternally builded, eternally overthrown,
Deep in the heart we find your vision and song.
Paths apart, that we took at last alone,
Led you not to the greater hills ere long?

O wine we drank, whose very dregs were delight!
I have seen your scarlet over a setting sun.
Flower of flesh and flower of an April night!
Far in the moon your loveliness is one.

Fates that mix with beauty of sun and moon
Love that seemed awhile the heart of a star,
Would I yearn for its joy if it had not died so soon?
Would I dream of its grace if it had not fled so far?

'Mid hush of wind and constellations paling,
Thou gleamest yet, O herald of the dawn!
Tho sister stars, whom light is slowly veiling,
Tremble and pass, in quietude withdrawn.

Now Nature, stilled as tho in adoration,
Bids, voiceless, that the hallowed heart aspire
To pause before thy beauty's consummation
And make itself the altar of thy fire.

Slowly above the darkened forest creeping,
One cloud, the lonely child of Heaven and Night,
Across the sky goes desolate and weeping,
Shrouding the north, but not thy vestal light.

O incommunicable beauty burning
With silent flame the body and the soul!
The exalted gaze, in solitude upturning,
Finds in thy star a mystery and goal.

Azures of twilight robe the southern mountain,
Where wakes the bird to greet thee with his mirth,
And see thine image in the tranquil fountain—
Too bright, too calm, too pure a thing for earth.

I dream that song can echo of thy singing,
Who dream thou singest in thy clear domain,
Till from thy zone the falling music, ringing,
Mingles its crystal with the falling rain.

Flushed as with radiance of wings immortal,
Glow now the tracts on which thy glory came,
Till through the amethystine eastern portal
The morning comes, led by thy dying flame.

Farewell! whose presence now and each to-morrow
Makes lyrical the heavens and the years,
Wedding the breath of ecstasy and sorrow,
That beauty such as thine transcend its tears.

THE EVENING STAR

Eastward in afterglow the mountains rise,
An evanescent rose on granite fading—
Far hues that seem, a crystal silence aiding,
The walls of a deserted Paradise.

The sunset dies, with scarlet pinions furled. . . .
On azure plains the sea-winds sink or falter. . . .
Evening and ocean are thy shrine and altar,
O grail of silver lifted to a world!

The wine of thy pure chalice none shall drain;
But he that sees thy vesper glory burning
Shall walk the purple of thy kingdom, spurning
All loveliness that haunts him without pain.

The mighty waters, darkening afar,
Throng the grey shores with mournful voices calling.
Echoes reply. Earth's shadow, eastward falling,
Is cold upon the pathway of the star.

The loneliness departing sunsets leave
  Is deeper for the vision of thy splendor,
  Whose radiance, ethereal and tender,
Burns tremorless upon the winter eve.

O flame above the Islands of the Blest!
  Often, ah! often, not alone in story,
  Have young Love's eyes been lifted to thy glory,
Yearning to follow thee beyond the West—

Yearning in vain, through all unhappy years:
  He shares with Beauty her inherent sorrow.
  As yesterday beheld, so must to-morrow
Behold thy light regathered by his tears.

The charts of sea and heavens limn thy flight,
  Yet still we seek a Land beyond, whose faces
  Forever gleam with thy mysterious traces—
Touched faintly by thy slowly setting light.

O Land that youth alone, or folly, seeks!
A Shadowland, these many years forbidden,
By sunset or the last horizon hidden,
And thou the fire above its altar-peaks.

So art thou light to that which only seems;
So art thou symbol of another Setting
To us, unfortunate and unforgetting,
Homesick for that lost country of our dreams.

TO THE MOON

Whether by starry waters westward led,
Where foam as white as thou is on the coast,
Or when the lilies of the dawn are red,
Ever thou seemest lonely, and a ghost.

'Mid frost of stars I saw thee pace the night,
High over quiet field and voiceless tree,
When Sirius trembled like a tear of light,
On sapphire darker than the morning sea.

When ocean drank the dregs of sunset's wine
I watched thy keen-horned crescent sink and go
On islands past the vague horizon line
Bent like a Titan's huge and golden bow,

Or like a wave that broke to stirless foam
Upon a beach of Heaven, curved and vast—
Sands where the shades of mariners might roam
And watch a spectral sail go dumbly past.

And I have seen thee crumbling and decayed,
A sepulchre of beauty long unsung—
On whose chill nacre wreaths as chill were laid
And sorrows graven in a nameless tongue.

And I have seen thee glorious and great,
Flooding the world and walking free of bars;
Arcturus was thy captain at the gate,
And thy companions were immortal stars.

Yet ever wert thou wraith and wanderer
Within that desolation of the sky,
Gazing on realms where worlds no longer were,
Whose death had shown thee how all worlds
must die—

Wherefore our own. Is it for this that we
Are pensive in thy melancholy light,
Guessing, from thine, the sun's mortality,
The cold and silence of the crypts of night?

Gleamest thou symbol of oblivion,
  Showing with frozen light, but light no less,
What swords are on the roadway of the sun,
  What Shadows gather in the Timelessness?

Or art thou pledge that recompense may be,
  And beauty, changing, still abide with death—
A crystal clearer for an icy sea,
  A snowflake born of winter's arctic breath?

For still thou grantest to our dreams a way,
  Whether thy silver dawn is on the east,
Or where, between the starlight and the day,
  Thy feet of alabaster go released;

And ocean calls, remembering thy lure,
  And gathers jewels for thy path of flame,
Heaped diamond, unfathomable, pure,
  From age to age reshattered—and the same.

As waters follow thee in wide pursuit,
So dost thou lead us to a dream's beyond.
Washed by thy tides of pearl the land lies mute,
And mute our souls, touched by thy magic's wand.

So lead awhile, till we be led no more,
Nor take, as thou, our morrows from the sun. . . .
Slowly, from mountain-peak to soundless shore,
Time's purple deepens to oblivion.

THE HIDDEN POOL

Far in a wildwood dim and great and cool,
I found a cavern old,
Where grew, above a pure, unfathomed pool,
A flower of elfin gold.

There, tho the night came lone of any lamp,
Chill on the flower fell
A pallor faint, inimical and damp,
A halo like in Hell.

Lambent it gleamed within the twilight calm,
Long fugitive of day—
Malign, I thought, with alien dew and balm,
A moon of baneful ray.

A breath of attar, fallen from the bloom,
Made opiate the air,
Like wafture of an undulant perfume,
Flown from enchanted hair.

A vampire bat, malignant, purple, cold,
At midnight came to glean
The honey that each petal would withhold
From all but the unclean.

Goblin and witch, I dream, have mingled here
The venom of their blood,
Nightly communing when that flower of fear
Had broken not the bud.

But, lich or lemur, none remained to note
The pollen falling chill,
A film on rock or pool, each yellow mote
Pregnant with hate and ill.

None other bent to watch, within that crypt,
The bitter fountain foam,
Nor knew, beyond, what violet ichor dripped
From wall and hidden dome,

Nor why (tho none came there to fail and drown)
The troubled water boiled,
When touched in that dark clarity, deep down,
A pallid hydra coiled.

What ghoul may come to pluck that flower of doom
No witch hath rendered clear:
The warden of an unrevealing gloom,
I watch and wait and fear.

It well may be a Form of death may own
The twilight for a pall;
Till then I haunt the caverned air alone,
With quiet under all.

Plotting by night her death,
The god rechanted that Aeaean rune,
Till men beheld a vapor dim the moon
With grey, demoniac breath.

When charm and rune were whole,
He brought that golden one a golden flagon,
Made in the image of a writhing dragon,
With teeth that clutched the bowl.

He poured vermilion wine
In that pale cup, to god or faun forbid,
Knowing the witch knew not the venom hid
In that red anodyne.

He gave the witch, who quaffed
And, drinking, dreamt not who had poured for her,
Nor why the cup came redolent of myrrh,
Nor why her leopard laughed;

Nor felt, from floor to dome,
Her high pavilion quiver on the dark,
Ere, with an augury too dim to mark,
A quiet lapped her home.

In all her magic craft
There lay no power to warn her to beware
The bitter drop from Lethe mingled there
Within the traitor draught.

But ere a pang of fright
Could wake, or he be bidden to depart,
There broke a little wound above her heart,
From which the blood dripped bright.

And heaven and earth grew dim,
While round the throne there gleamed a coral flood,
From her who knew not why the forfeit blood
Fell lyrical for him.

"Wherefore thy woe these many years,
O hermit by the sea?
What is the grief the winds awake,
And waters cry to thee?"

"It was in piracy we sailed,
Great galleons to strip.
On a far day, on a far sea,
We took her father's ship.

Red-sided rocked the *Rey del Sur*
Whenas its deck we won.
I slew before her eyes divine
Her father and his son.

There was no sin I had not sinned,
On deep sea and ashore;
But when I looked in those great eyes,
Villain was I no more.

I captain claimed her as my prize,
Tho maids in common were.
Alone 'mid that fell company,
I cast my lot with her.

They put us in an open boat,
With seven days' food and drink;
Then slipped those traitor topsails down
Beyond the ocean's brink.

Night came, and morn, but rose no sail
On that horizon-verge;
I took the oars and set our prow
Against the lessening surge.

It was scant provender we had,
Tho she was unaware;
Right soon I feared, and by deceit
I gave her all my share.

She would not speak; she scarce would
look;
Her pain was past my cure.
Red-scuppered in our hells of dream
Wallowed the *Rey del Sur.*

On a far day, on a far sea,
Our shallop southward crept;
With aching arms and splitten lips
I labored—and she wept.

Dawn upon dawn, dark upon dark,
Nor ever land nor wind!
The nights were chill, the stars were
keen,
The sun swung hot and blind.

Our drink and food long since were
gone. . . .
We laid us down to die. . . .
Then came a booming of a surf,
And palm-trees met mine eye.

I steered us through the broken reef;
  Fainting, I won to shore;
I gazed upon her changéd face,
  But she on mine no more

Below the palms I buried her,
  Whose bale-star I had been;
And since, by this bleak coast of snows,
  I sorrow for my sin.

There was none other of our kind
  That had her heavenly face.
On a far Day, by a far Sea.
  I trust to know her grace."

THE SLAYING OF THE WITCH

Erik the prince came back from sea,
His galley low with spoil—
Armor and silks and weeping slaves,
Silver and wine and oil.

And there was one that did not weep,
But laughed in Erik's face,
And 'tween the helmsman and the mast
Strode with a leopard's grace.

Her hair was darker than the night
In which our foemen sink;
Her limbs were whiter than the milk
Of which our maidens drink.

Her lips were coral-red; her eyes
As shoaling seas were green.
She wore cupped gold on either breast
And one blue gem between.

And cross her path or say her word
No man save Erik dared;
But all day long men stood apart,
And knit their brows, and stared.

And they have made the harbor strand,
And all have seen her charms;
Erik has borne her to the shore
Uplifted in his arms.

Soon in the council-hall they stood
Of Gudrod, sire and king,
Who bade grey Sigurd, seer and skald,
The prince's valor sing.

Long looked the skald on Erik's face
And face of her he led;
Then snatched the blade from Erik's belt
And stabbed the captive dead.

Erik has sprung at Sigurd's throat,
But four lords hold him fast,
With eyes that glare on nothingness,
And straining arms upcast.

There is hot tumult in the place,
With clash of steel and word,
Until in thunder over all
The king's deep voice is heard.

"Assoil thee, skald! and give good cause
For this that thou hast done,
Or ravens for thy sightless eyes
Shall fight ere set of sun!"

The skald stood silent and apart,
Then smiled upon his deed.
"It is that we bleed not," he said,
"That she in time does bleed.

From isles of sin that one was brought,
  Far westward and to-south;
She whispered in a witch's tongue
  And has a harlot's mouth.

O Gudrod! in thy grandsire's time
  Such one across the sill
Was led into the royal house
  To love, and plot her will.

Thou hast heard sung what strong one's death
  Her cunning did devise,
With sorcery of philtred glance,—
  With promise of her eyes.

Thou hast heard sung the woes she wrought
  With swords of jealous men:
Know now that in this serpent slain
  That poison came again!

I have done well by thee and thine—
  Thy daughters, lords and son;
And many hearts shall go unpierced,
  For that I pierced this one."

He made an end, and stood aloof. . . .
  The great king bent his head. . . .
Then, gazing long on him that slew,
  "Thou hast done well," he said.

But from the sorceress the blood
  Crept slowly on the stone,
And pointed like a scarlet arm
  At Gudrod on his throne.

TO TWILIGHT

Linger, we pray,
Shy mother of the white and earliest star!
For in thy keeping are
The Dreams that suffer not the light of day—
Dim presences, that find us from afar.

O soundless feet,
Between the night and sunset hesitant!
The cricket's eager chant
And voice of some faint bell, remotely sweet,
Alone await thee, clear and consonant.

Sing to thyself
A song as pure, as low, as delicate,
Ere music seem too late,
Or yet the moonray seek the hidden elf,
Or mute, the night fall uncompassionate.

We shall not hear;
But in the heart an echo swiftly flown
Shall touch us from thine own,
And voices of the past, forlorn and clear,
Shall haunt us from the days that love has known. . . .

So hast thou come,
Whose benediction ceases not for night,
To close the gates of light,
And tell, from fields for thee a moment dumb,
That age-old pain of Beauty and her flight.

BEYOND THE BREAKERS

TO JAMES HOPPER

The world was full of the sound of a great wind
out of the West,
And the tracks of its feet were white on the
trampled ocean's breast.
And I said, "With the sea and wind I will mix
my body and soul,
Where the breath of the planet drives and the
herded billows roll."

And down through the pines I went, to the shore-
sands warm and white,
Till I saw from the ocean's verge the gulls in
clamorous flight,—
Till the wind was sharp in my face, and pure and
strong in its sweep
From the smokeless dome of the world and a thous-
and leagues of the deep.

The breakers rose before me where the hard, wet
sands were grey—

Each in its colored robe, fronting the new-born day;
The singing waves of the sea, clean beyond all of clean,
Beautiful, swift, alive, undulant, apple-green.

Who shall grapple with lions or wrestle with seraphim?
Even so can the surf come forth in its power to him—
Legion crying to legion, hurled to the steadfast shore;
Rampart answering rampart, where the flame-shaped summits roar.

And I flung me forth at their strength, at their might of motion and sound,
Till the foam-bolts stung my brow and the foam-chains ringed me around,
And the hissing ridges ran like dragons driven by gods—
Mad with the battle-cries and their unseen lashes and rods.

From fighting nostrils to feet the ocean clad me in cold,
Tingling, thrilling and sweet, a raiment none could behold,
As I rose with urging of arms to the shattered foam-crests' rain,
To look far over the deep and sink from the wind again.

O hills of voices and snows, O valleys of sapphire and calm,
That smote and wrenched and released to moments of respite and balm!
Splendid, young and eternal, from bridals of wind and sea,
Tho I sleep at last in your vaults, yet first ye shall war with me!

Furious, swift, they came, the pulse and surge of the deep,
Rank on rank in their beauty, poised for the shoreward leap,
Lifting my form in crystal to gaze out over the West,—

Clutching in sudden wrath at limbs and loins and breast.

Then was it as tho companions, godlike, alert, unseen,
Swam under and at my sides, with sight unerring and keen,
Touching, splashing and laughing (and I hear their laughter still),
Where the foam shot sudden veils in the waters torn and chill.

And I shouted to them in kinship, in ocean ardor and love,
Lifting an arm to the sun and the azure far above,—
Mixing my voice with theirs and the sea-wind's lordly song,—
Feeling them stir about me, the swimmers happy and strong.

Felt I not with them, the invisible at mirth,
The wind and wonder of life, the thrill and union of earth?—

More intimate, more sure, for the sea's high loneliness,
Than the blinded sages dream, or the land-bound people guess.

The great embrace of ocean was closer than love's can be;
Its clasp was sharp on my limbs, yet went I supple and free.
The breast of the deep unheaved as a mother's under a child—
Terrible, tender, strong, imperial, undefiled.

So for a space I lived with life intense and aware,
Far from the human swarm and mortal folly and care—
I, the foam of earth, assoiled by the ocean-foam,
I, the homeless of worlds, forgetting the dream of Home.

Yet in the end it was earth that called me in from the vast,
Till the salt, wild waters boiled and the spray was thin on the blast,

And the undertow swept out, laughing at strength
like mine,
Till I rode to shore on a wave that stung with its
hurtled brine.

Carmel, California.

THE SWIMMERS

We were eight fishers of the western sea,
Who sailed our craft beside a barren land,
Where harsh with pines the herdless mountains stand
And lonely beaches be.

There no man dwells, and ships go seldom past;
Yet sometimes there we lift our keels ashore,
To rest in safety 'mid the broken roar
And mist of surges vast.

One strand we know, remote from all the rest,
For north and south the cliffs are high and steep,
Whose naked leagues of rock repel the deep,
Insurgent from the west.

Tawny it lies, untrodden e'er by man,
Save when from storm we sought its narrow rift,
To beach our craft and light a fire of drift,
And sleep till day began.

Along its sands no flower nor bird has home.
Abrupt its breast, girt by no splendor save
The whorled and poising emerald of the wave
And scarves of rustling foam—

A place of solemn beauty; yet we swore,
By all the ocean stars' unhasting flight,
To seek no refuge for another night
Upon that haunted shore.

That year a somber autumn held the earth.
At dawn we sailed from out our village bay;
We sang; a taut wind leapt along the day;
The sea-birds mocked our mirth.

Southwest we flew, like arrows to a mark;
Ere set of sun the coast was far to lee,
Where thundered over by the white-hooved sea
The reefs lie gaunt and dark.

But when we would have cast our hooks, the main
Grew wroth a-sudden, and our captains said:
"Seek we a shelter." And the west was red;
God gave his winds the rein.

And eastward lay the sands of which I told;
Thither we fled, and on the narrow beach
Drew up our keels beyond the lessening reach
Of waters green and cold.

Then set the wounded sun. The wind blew clean
The skies. A wincing star came forth at last.
We heard like mighty tollings on the blast
The shock of waves unseen.

The wide-winged Eagle hovered overhead;
The Scorpion crept slowly in the south
To pits below the horizon; in its mouth
Lay a young moon that bled.

And from our fire the ravished flame swept back,
Like yellow hair of one who flies apace,
Compelled in lands barbarian to race
With lions on her track.

Then from the maelstroms of the surf arose
Wild laughter, mystical, and up the sands
Came Two that walked with intertwining hands
Amid those ocean snows.

Ghostly they shone before the lofty spray—
Fairer than gods and naked as the moon,
The foamy fillets at their ankles strewn
Less marble-white than they.

Laughing they stood, then to our beacon's flare
Drew nearer, as we watched in mad surprise
The scarlet-flashing lips, the sea-green eyes,
The red and tangled hair.

Then spoke the god (goddess and god they seemed),
In harplike accents of a tongue unknown—
About his brows the dripping locks were blown;
Like wannest gold he gleamed.

Staring we sat; again the Vision spoke.
Beyond his form we saw the billows rave,—
The leap of those white leopards in the wave,—
The spume of seas that broke.

Yet sat we mute, for then a human word
Seemed folly's worst. And scorn began to trace
Its presence on the wild, imperious face;
Again the red lips stirred,

But spoke not. In an instant we were free
From that enchantment: fleet as deer they turned,
And sudden amber leapt the sands they spurned.
We saw them meet the sea.

We heard the seven-chorded surf, unquelled,
Call in one thunder to the granite walls;
But over all, like broken clarion-calls,
Disdainful laughter welled.

Then silence, save for cloven wave and wind.
Our fire had faltered on its little dune.
Far out a fog-wall reared, and hid the moon.
The night lay vast and blind.

Silent, we waited the assuring morn,
Which rose on angered waters. But we set
Our hooded prows to sea, and, tempest-wet,
Beat up the coast forlorn.

And no man scorned our tale, for well they knew
Had mystery befallen: in our eyes
Were alien terrors and unknown surmise.
Men saw the tale was true.

And no man seeks a refuge on that shore,
Tho tempests gather in impelling skies;
Unseen, unsolved, unhazarded it lies,
Forsaken evermore.

For on those sands immaculate and lone,
Perchance They list the sea's eternal lyre,
When sunset casts an evanescent fire
Through billows thunder-sown.

Duandon, king of Aetria's farthest bound
And lord of isles the sea is loud around,
Beheld the crimson fountains of the dawn
Bear up the lark, a foam of song, till drawn
By some new sorrow in the ocean's tone,
Thither he fared, expectant and alone.
Thither he fared, fresh from the sea of sleep,
And all the balmy land was blossomed deep,
Nor could one wander save on helpless flow'rs,
Where Summer made a garland of the hours
And bound it on the dew-dipt brow of Morn,
Bent low above the meadow's blossom-bourn.
But past all peace of bowers rang the call
And invocation of the billows' fall,
And, clean from kingdoms of the sapphire vast,
The winds of ocean smote his brow at last.
Afar he saw the eddying petrel sweep
O'er reefs where hoarser roared the thwarted deep,
And soon before his eyes, exultant, fain,
Heavy with azure gleamed the investing main,
And quick with pulsings of a distant storm,

Strong as that music floating Troy to form.
Splendid the everlasting ocean shone
As God's blue robe upon a desert thrown;
Landward he saw the sea-born breakers fare,
Young as a wind and ancient as the air;
August he saw the unending ranks uproll,
With joy and wonder mastering the soul,
With marvel on the hearing and the sight—
Green fires, and billows tremulous with light,
With shaken soul of light and shuddering blaze
Of leaping emerald and cold chrysoprase,—
The surge and suspiration of the sea,
Great waters choral of eternity,—
The mighty dirge that will not cease for day
Nor all the stars' invincible array,—
The thunder that has set, since Time began,
Its sorrow in the lonely heart of man.

Long stood the king before that wide review,
Divining, deep beyond its sound and hue,
Unfathomable mystery and dream,—
Rapture and woe illusive but supreme;
And as the pine against the sea-wind sighs,

So thrilled his breast with whispers and surmise;
Till, on a beach that only he might roam,
The sea, from broadest tapestries of foam,
From mighty looms immaculate and cold,
A scarlet shell before his feet uprolled.
Wet as with blood against the dawn it flamed,
Deep-whorled and irised, lustrous and unnamed—
A jewel of the sea that burned and shone
Like some king-ruby ravished from a throne.
And long Duandon wandered, all-amazed,
And long upon the shell's wild beauty gazed,
Until, remembering, swiftly to his ear
He held it, eager as a child to hear
That echo like the murmuring of seas—
Astray forever on a mournful breeze
And borne from some remote, nocturnal bound;
Whereat a voice, in sorceries of sound
To which the grace of vanished lyres had clung,
Sang from the shell as never voice had sung:

Far down, where virgin silence reigns,
In jasper evenings of the sea,
I toss my pearls, I wait for thee.

The sea has lent me all its stains:
It is but treasure-house of me.

The corals of the deep have caught
A Titan shell whose fragile dome
Is crimson o'er mine ocean home—
Mine opal chambers subtly wrought
In semblance of the shaken foam.

Oh, come! and thou shalt dream with me,
By violet foam at twilight tossed
On strands of ocean islets lost
To prows that seek them wearily,
O'er seas by questing sunsets crossed.

All dreams that Hope has promised Love,
All beauty thou hast sought in vain,
All joy held once and lost again,
Those, and the mystery thereof,
I guard beneath the sundering main.

So rang that crystal cry, as from afar,
Clear as the voice of Heaven's whitest star,

And strong Duandon pondered, with his gaze
Set like twin stars above those azure ways.
Keener his heart, a plummet, yearned to sound
The gulf that held his soul amazed and bound,
Where, darker for the sky's unclouded dome,
The waves took sudden coronals of foam,
Till half he deemed he saw, far out, the white
Flung arms and bosom of the ocean-sprite.
Hour beyond hour, until the sun was fled,
Strode he on sands that none but him might tread;
Hour beyond hour one sight his vision drank—
A foam-white arm that beckoned once, and sank.
Then, wave to wave in deeper anthems roared,
And realm by realm the belted sunset soared,
As tho a city of the Titans burned
In lands below the sea-line, undiscerned;
Till desolation touched it, zone by zone,
Its splendors gone, like jewels turned to stone,
And sad with evening sang the ocean-choirs,
Domed by stars' imperishable fires.

But still Duandon lingered on the sands
And clasped the shell with indecisive hands;

Ghostly it gleamed, nor music would outpour
Save of the sea on some disastrous shore.
And still he stood, and listened but to hark
The surf, like dragons battling in the dark;
Implacable they ravened, ere the moon,
A towering glory on the eastern dune,
A frozen splendor on the seething strand,
In silver webs had snared the sea and land.
Then, as on hostile waves her arrows leapt,
Duandon turned him from the sea, and slept.
Slept, but the morning found him yet again
A lonely searcher of the lonelier main;
And night by night, and day by barren day,
Silent he stood before the waves' array—
The victim of an unrelenting strife
Of joy with death, of love with love of life.
Ever at dawn the voice from out the shell
Renewed within his heart the siren's spell;
Ever the wild, enchanting melody
Rang as the sun was wedded to the sea.
And still the royal pageant of the world
Before his doom-bewildered eyes unfurled,

With dusky stain of sunsets northward drawn
And cloudy headlands of the coasts of dawn.
Beyond that realm of jade and jade-bound bays,
He saw the sapphire fields of ocean blaze;
Heard the allegiant waters chant their rune
Before the turquoise battlements of noon,
Where evening armies of the mist would roam
As twilight mixed its purple with the foam,—
Where sunlight, checked in its torrential leap,
Would froth at dawn about some cloudland steep.
Debarred was peace, tho Sleep, with tender hand,
Led him awhile in her allaying land;
For soon the sea flowed in upon his dream,
And far below he saw the Singer gleam—
Her floating hair and pearly body's grace,
With sunken moonlight pure upon her face.
So still he yearned, on whom her spell was laid,
And ever sunset, like a golden blade,
Cut day by day from life, and ever he
Heard like the voice of Death the lordly sea,
Chanting, enthroned on choric reef and bars,
Its midnight song below the western stars,

And all the stars seemed ministrant to doom
As high Orion trod his arc of gloom.

Broke then a morning when the weary sea
Lay hushed above its halls of mystery;
Besieging fog hung mute on shore and vale,
With pallid banners and with ashen mail,
And ocean, grey as with oblivion,
Lay hidden from the visage of the sun.
High noon drove not the phantom army forth,
Nor winds slow-seeping from the muffled North,
And weary with its vigil of the deep,
Duandon's soul put out on seas of sleep;
Dreamless he lay ere sunset, and the shell,
Unguarded, from assenting fingers fell.
Came then, nor spilt that anodyne of rest,
His only son, impatient with the quest,
New-fared from crimson victories of war,—
Tall as the spears that lesser champions bore.
To him the horizon was a smitten chord
That rang in challenge to his youthful sword,
And thrilled with all the murmurs of romance
The realms remote from his insatiate lance.

Silent awhile he stood, and ere he spoke,
Routed at last, the sea-mist's army broke,
And, as its ranks fled landward to their knell,
The consummating sunset smote the shell. . . .

Duandon woke below the evening star,
And saw the foam's incessant scimetar
Flash from the billow's sheath, and heard the cry
Of winds released upon the western sky;
Forlorn beyond the darkling waters lay
The sullen embers of the pyre of Day—
Dull, ere obscuring night should make the sea
One with the reaches of infinity;
Then to the sands his gaze returned, to meet
The seaward print of unreturning feet.
Gone was the shell; a sword lay in its stead,
From altars of the buried sun made red—
A blade he knew so well from all the rest
It seemed that instant to transfix his breast.
Afar or near, on waters grey and lone,
No swimmer swept, no arm uplifted shone;
Austere and vacant rolled the cryptic main,
Unsearchable: the prince came not again,

Unseen on tawny beach or waters loud,—
Gone like the shadow of a vanished cloud.

Aye! better vanished, than to wait, as he,
Duandon, silent by the unmastered sea,
From which, till death, his heart was doomed to crave
The uncomprehended tidings of the wave—
An echo of that music from the shell
Forever vibrant in its fall and swell—
Was fated, still, from azure gulfs to dream
He saw the arm of some white swimmer gleam,
Flung for an instant from the shifting spray—
Siren, or son, or both, he could not say.

And feelest *thou* no pangs of beauty lost,
When morning waves or waters sunset-crost
Cry to thy soul, unsatisfied, alone,
Of Isles to which its younger dreams have flown?
The might-have-been, the nevermore-to-be,
Bears not the deep their antiphon to thee?
For man has found, as man shall ever find,
Some echo of his travail on the wind,

And sigh of great Departures, and the breath
Of pinions incontestable by Death.
Of stars and shadows past to-morrow's ken
He finds him vision and announcement, when,
As storms beyond the horizon-line prolong
The sea's imperious, eternal song,
The thunder-chorded surf on yellow sands
Resounds, like harps on which the gods lay hands.

THREE SONNETS OF THE NIGHT SKIES

I

ALDEBARAN AT DUSK

Thou art the star for which all evening waits—
O star of peace, come tenderly and soon,
Nor heed the drowsy and enchanted moon,
Who dreams in silver at the eastern gates
Ere yet she brim with light the blue estates
Abandoned by the eagles of the noon.
But shine thou swiftly on the darkling dune
And woodlands where the twilight hesitates.

Above that wide and ruby lake to-West,
Wherein the sunset waits reluctantly,
Stir silently the purple wings of Night.
She stands afar, upholding to her breast,
As mighty murmurs reach her from the sea,
Thy lone and everlasting rose of light.

II

THE CHARIOTS OF DAWN

O Night! is this indeed the morning-star,
That now with brandished and impatient beam
On eastern heights of darkness flames supreme,
Or some great captain of the dawn, whose car
Scornful of all thy rear-guard ranks that bar
His battle, now foreruns the helms that gleam
Below horizons of dissevering dream,
His javelin lifted to his hosts afar?

Now am I minded of some ocean-king
That in a war of gods has wielded arms,
And still in slumber hears their harness ring
And dreams of isles where golden altars fume,
Till, mad for irretrievable alarms,
He passes down the seas to some strange doom.

III

THE HUNTRESS OF STARS

Tell me, O Night! what horses hale the moon!
Those of the sun rear now on Syria's day,
But here the steeds of Artemis delay
At heavenly rivers hidden from the noon,
Or quench their starry thirst at cisterns hewn
In midnight's deepest sapphire, ere she slay
The Bull, and hide the Pleiades' dismay,
Or drown Orion in a silver swoon.

Are those the stars, and not their furious eyes,
That now before her coming chariot glare?
Is that their nebulous, phantasmal breath
Trailed like a mist upon the winter skies,
Or vapors from a Titan's pyre of death—
Far-wafted on the orbit of Altair?

THEEE SONNETS ON OBLIVION

I

OBLIVION

Her eyes have seen the monoliths of kings
  Upcast like foam of the effacing tide;
  She has beheld the desert stars deride
The monuments of Power's imaginings.
About their base the wind Assyrian flings
  The dust that throned the satrap in his pride;
  Cambyses and the Memphian pomps abide
As in the flame the moth's presumptuous wings.

There gleams no glory that her hand shall spare,
  Nor any sun whose rays shall cross her night,
    Whose realm enfolds man's empire and its end.
No armor of renown her sword shall dare,
  No council of the gods withstand her might:
    Stricken at last Time's lonely Titans bend.

II

THE DUST DETHRONED

Sargon is dust, Semiramis a clod!
In crypts profaned the moon at midnight peers;
The owl upon the Sphinx hoots in her ears,
And scant and sere the desert grasses nod
Where once the armies of Assyria trod,
With younger sunlight splendid on the spears;
The lichens cling the closer with the years,
And seal the eyelids of the weary god.

Where high the tombs of royal Egypt heave,
The vulture shadows with arrested wings
The indecipherable boasts of kings,
As Arab children hear their mother's cry
And leave in mockery their toy—they leave
The skull of Pharaoh staring at the sky.

III

THE NIGHT OF GODS

Their mouths have drunken Death's eternal wine—
The draught that Baal in oblivion sips.

Unseen about their courts the adder slips,
Unheard the sucklings of the leopard whine;
The toad has found a resting-place divine,
And bloats in stupor between Ammon's lips.
O Carthage and the unreturning ships,
The fallen pinnacle, the shifting Sign!

Lo! when I hear from voiceless court and fane
Time's adoration of Eternity—
The cry of kingdoms past and gods undone—
I stand as one whose feet at noontide gain
A lonely shore; who feels his soul set free,
And hears the blind sea chanting to the sun.

THE SKULL OF SHAKESPEARE

I

Without how small, within how strangely vast!
What stars of terror had their path in thee!
What music of the heavens and the sea
Lived in a sigh or thundered on the blast!
Here swept the gleam and pageant of the Past.
As Beauty trembled to her fate's decree;
Here swords were forged for armies yet to be,
And tears were found too dreadful not to last.

Here stood the seats of judgment and its light,
To whose assizes all our dreams were led—
Our best and worst, our Paradise and Hell;
And in this room delivered now to night,
The mortal put its question to the dead,
And worlds were weighed, and God's deep shadow fell.

II

Here an immortal river had its rise,
Tho dusty now the fountain whence it ran

So swift and beautiful with good to man.
Here the foundation of an empire lies—
The ruins of a realm seen not with eyes,
That now the vision of a gnat could scan.
Here wars were fought within a little span,
Whose echoes yet resound on human skies.

Life, on her rainbow road from dust to dust,
Spilt here her wildest iris, still thine own,
Master, and with thy soul and ashes one!
Thy wings are distant from our years of lust,
Yet he who liveth not by bread alone
Shall see thee as that angel in the sun.

THE SETTING OF ANTARES

The skies are clear, the summer night is old.
The foamless ocean reaches to the West,
With troubled moonlight on its tranquil breast,
Weary of grief eternally retold.
Now is that hour when winds and waters hold
A truce of silence and inducing rest,
And now, like ocean-eagles to their nest,
The stars go seaward, silvery and cold.

Antares, heart of blood, how stir your wings
Above the sea's mysterious murmurings!
The road of death leads outward to your light,
And you are symbol for a time of him
Whose fated star, companionless and dim,
Sinks to the wide horizon of the Night.

Cold and eternal stare his eyes of stone,
As now, adored across the templed gloom,
The graven god exalts his granite room.
Implacably his acolytes intone:
The smitten gong makes answer in a groan;
Slowly the azures of the worship fume,
Phantoms awhile of that enduring tomb,
And "Life is evil!" now the bonzes drone.

Without, a darkness passionate with breath
Of unseen flowers—a fragrance at the shrine
Of two that lie incredulous of death.
The grass is cool beneath her, and the night
Holds, as a rose her immaterial wine,
The moan and murmur of the old delight.

"OMNIA EXEUNT IN MYSTERIUM"

I

The stranger in my gates—lo! that am I,
And what my land of birth I do not know,
Nor yet the hidden land to which I go.
One may be lord of many ere he die,
And tell of many sorrows in one sigh,
But know himself he shall not, nor his woe,
Nor to what sea the tears of wisdom flow,
Nor why one star is taken from the sky.

An urging is upon him evermore,
And tho he bide, his soul is wanderer,
Scanning the shadows with a sense of haste
Where fade the tracks of all who went before—
A dim and solitary traveller
On ways that end in evening and the waste.

II

How dumb the vanished billions who have died!
With backward gaze conjectural we wait,
And ere the invading Shadow penetrate,

The echo from a mighty heart that cried
Is made a sole memorial to pride.
From out that night's inscrutable estate,
A few cold voices wander, desolate
With all that love has lost or grief has sighed.

Slaves, seamen, captains, councillors and kings,
Gone utterly, save for those echoes far!
As they before, I tread a forfeit land,
Till the supreme and ancient silence flings
Its pall between the dreamer and the star.
O desert wide! O little grain of sand!

SONNETS BY THE NIGHT SEA

I

Surely the dome of unremembered nights
  Was heavy with those stars! The peaceless sea,
  Casting in foam their fallen shafts to me,
Makes ancient music to their awful heights.
O quenchless and insuperable lights!
  What life shall meet your gaze and thence go free
  From litten midnights of eternity
To havens open to your final flights?

Abides nor goal nor ultimate of peace,
  Nor lifts a beacon on the cosmic deep
    To guide our wandering world on seas sublime,
Nor any night to grant the soul release,
  Swung as a pendulum from life to sleep,
    From sleep to life, from Timelessness to Time.

II

Now, as I hear upon the caverned night
The ocean's ceaseless and stupendous dirge,
And one by one the stars approach its verge,
The deep seems all one prayer, and the light
Of farthest suns but questions for the sight
Of men who yet may test the Dark, to urge
Life's portent from the starlight and the surge,
And read the ancient Mystery aright.

Do blinded powers from their darkness seek,
Through human sight, that secret to attain?
From fonts how distant is the spirit fed?
And who are we? And is it we who speak
The Why we utter to the night of pain,
The Whither to the unresponding dead?

III

You seem so inexhaustible, O sea!
And infinite of nature; yet I know
That by divine permission could we go
Within your sealed and silent deeps, and be

Of all your glooms and treasuries made free,
The soul at last each marvel would outgrow,
Till each were vain as festal fires that glow
Beneath the stars' immortal scrutiny.

And were all alien worlds and suns laid bare
Till Mystery their secret should declare,
The finite soon its utmost would impart,
And sun nor world at last have power to thrill
Man's wayward and insatiable heart,
Which God and all His truth alone can fill.

IV

The wind of night is like an ocean's ghost.
The deep is greatly troubled. I, alone,
See the wave shattered and the wave-crest thrown
Where pine and cypress hold their ancient post.
The sounds of war, the trampling of a host,
Over the borders of the world are blown;
The feet of armies deathless and unknown
Halt, baffled, at the ramparts of the coast.

Yea! and the Deep is troubled! In this heart
Are voices of a far and shadowy Sea,
Above whose wastes no lamp of earth shall gleam.
Farewells are spoken and the ships depart
For that horizon and its mystery,
Whose stars tell not if life, or death, is dream.

V

The wind of night is mighty on the deep—
A presence haunting sea and land again.
That wind upon the watery waste has been;
That wind upon the desert soon shall sweep.
O vast and mournful spirit, wherefore keep
Your vigil at the fleeting homes of men,
Who need no voice of yours to tell them when
Is come the hour to labor or to sleep?

From waste to waste you wander, and are dumb
Before the morning. Patient in her tree
The bird awaits until your strength hath passed,

Forgetting darkness when the day is come.
With other tidings have you burdened me,
Whom desolations harbor at the last.

THE BLACK VULTURE

Aloof within the day's enormous dome,
He holds unshared the silence of the sky.
Far down his bleak, relentless eyes descry
The eagle's empire and the falcon's home—
Far down, the galleons of sunset roam;
His hazards on the sea of morning lie;
Serene, he hears the broken tempest sigh
Where cold sierras gleam like scattered foam.

And least of all he holds the human swarm—
Unwitting now that envious men prepare
To make their dream and its fulfilment one,
When, poised above the caldrons of the storm,
Their hearts, contemptuous of death, shall dare
His roads between the thunder and the sun.

Till dawn the Winds' insuperable throng
  Passed over like archangels in their might,
  With roar of chariots from their stormy height,
And broken thunder of mysterious song—
By mariner or sentry heard along
  The visionary battlements of night—
  And wafture of immeasurable flight,
And high-blown trumpets mutinous and strong.

Till louder on the dreadful dark I heard
  The shrieking of the tempest-tortured tree,
    And deeper on immensity the call
  And tumult of the empire-forging sea;
But near the eternal Peace I lay, nor stirred,
    Knowing the happy dead hear not at all.

A MOOD

I am grown weary of permitted things
And weary of the care-emburdened age—
Of any dusty lore of priest and sage
To which no memory of Arcadia clings;
For subtly in my blood at evening sings
A madness of the faun—a choric rage
That makes all earth and sky seem but a cage
In which the spirit pines with cheated wings.

Rather by dusk for Lilith would I wait
And for a moment's rapture welcome death,
Knowing that I had baffled Time and Fate,
And feeling on my lips, that died with day
As sense and soul were gathered to a breath,
The immortal, deadly lips that kissing slay.

OCEAN SUNSETS

I

Men watch the wide magnificence uprolled,
A deathless surf of glory down the zones—
Ancient as that with which the deep intones
Its undelivered sorrow. Fold on fold
The foam of splendor deepens, far and cold,
Below the stars' imaginary thrones,
Till on the twilight of those sapphire stones
Are ashes of the sun-deserted gold.

Along the mighty rondure of the world
Forever and forever sweeps that wave,
From Arctic mountains to the southern floe,
In soundlessness on purple islands hurled,
With opalescent wash of hues that lave
Old summits, sacred in that afterglow.

II

How often, from the bleak sierra's crest,
The northern headland, the deserted shore,
Have eyes beheld that crimson billow soar,

To sink on Edens deeper in the West!
How often, on some fatal ocean-quest,
That light has gleamed upon the lifted oar—
Cast from that Golden House whose closing door
Is still the evading goal of our unrest.

Oh! far in time and far on alien seas
Its path has been the heroes' path of light,
Down which the galley, goddess-lured, was drawn.
Wildly that radiance was cast on these,
Till the red prow drove westward in the night,
Followed by slow Arcturus and the dawn.

III

Roll on, tremendous surf, till the last eyes
For the last time behold thy glory flame!
Then, in the sea of darkness whence they came
Resolve thy splendor and reverting dyes!
Thy forfeit hues shall fade on somber skies,
When, in a breath, man's grandeur and his shame

Pass to the silences that have no name,
Where dreams are never and the night denies.

Thy marvel is of man and not of thee,
And he being not, no longer thou shalt be.
Parent and worshipper of loveliness,
He walks a realm forbidden to the brute—
An alchemist whose spirit can transmute
Color and form to beauty's pure excess.

THE IRIS HILLS

FROM "ROSAMUND"

Up to the hills of iris we two went yearning.
O youth and youth's heart burning!
O winds of Spring!

Far on the hills of iris two lay forgetful.
O rapture unregretful!
O fire of Spring!

Down from the hills of iris we wandered slowly.
O lilies crushed and lowly!
O tears of Spring!

ODE ON THE CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF ROBERT BROWNING

As unto lighter strains a boy might turn
From where great altars burn
And Music's grave archangels tread the night,
So I, in seasons past,
Loved not the bitter might
And merciless control
Of thy bleak trumpets calling to the soul.
Their consummating blast
Held inspirations of affright,
As when a faun
Hears mournful thunders roll
On breathless, wide transparencies of dawn.
Nor would I hear
With thee, superb and clear
The indomitable laughter of the race;
Nor would I face
Clean Truth, with her cold agates of the well,
Nor with thee trace
Her footprints passing upward to the snows,
But sought a phantom rose

And islands where the ghostly siren sings;
Nor would I dwell
Where star-forsaking wings
On mortal thresholds hide their mystery,
Nor watch with thee
The light of Heaven cast on common things.

But now in dreams of day I see thee stand
A grey, great sentry on the encompassed wall
That fronts the Night forever, in thy hand
A consecrated spear
To test the dragons of man's ancient fear
From secret gulfs that crawl—
A captain of that choral band
Whose reverend faces, anxious of the Dark,
Yet undismayed
By rain of ruined worlds against the night,
Turned evermore to hark
The music of God's silence, and were stayed
By something other than the reason's light.
And I have seen thee as
An eagle, strong to pass
Where tempest-shapen clouds go to and fro

And winds and noons have birth,
But whose regard is on the lands below
And wingless things of earth.
And yet not thine for long
The feignéd passion of the nightingale
Nor shards of haliotis, nor the song
Of cymballed fountains hidden in the dale,
Nor gardens where the feet of Fragrance steal:
'Twas thine the laying-on to feel
Of tragic hands imperious and cold,
That, grasping, led thee from the dreams of old,
Making thee voyager
Of seas within the cosmic solitude,
Whose moons the long-familiar stars occlude,—
Whose living sunsets stir
With visions of the timelessness we crave.
And thou didst ride a wave
That gathered solemn music to its breast,
And breaking, shook our strand with thought's unrest,
Till men far inland heard its mighty call
Where the young mornings leap the world's blue wall.

Nature has lonely voices at her heart
And some thou heardst, for at thine own
Were chords beyond all Art,
That thrill but to the eternal undertone.
But not necessitous to thee
The dreams that were when Arcady began
Or Paphos soared in iris from the sea;
For thou couldst guess
The rainbows hidden in the frustrate slime,
And sawst in crownless Man
A Titan scourged through Time
With pains and raptures of his loneliness.
And thou wast wanderer
In that dim House that is the human heart,
Where thou didst roam apart,
Seeing what pillars were
Between its deep foundations and the sun,
What halls of dream undone,
What seraphs hold compassionate their wings
Between the youth and bitterness of things,
Ere all see clear
The gain in loss, the triumph in the tear.

Time's whitest loves lie radiant in thy song,
Like starlight on an ocean, for thine own
Was as a deathless lily grown
In Paradise—ethereal and strong.
And to thine eyes
Earth had no earth that held not haughty dust,
And seeds of future harvestings in trust,
And hidden azures of eventual skies.
Yet hadst thou sharper strains,
Even as the Power determines us with pains,
And seeing harvests, sawst as well the chaff,
And seeing Beauty, sawst her shames no less,
Loosing the sweet,
High thunder of thy Jovian laugh
On souls purblind in their self-righteousness.
O vision wide and keen!
Which knew, untaught, that pains to joyance are
As night unto the star
That on the effacing dawn must burn unseen.
And thou didst know what meat
Was torn to give us milk,
What countless worms made possible the silk
That robes the mind, what plan

Drew as a bubble from old infamies
And fen-pools of the past
The shy and many-colored soul of man.
Yea! thou hast seen the lees
In that rich cup we lift against the day,
Seen the man-child at his disastrous play—
His shafts without a mark,
His fountains flowing downward to the dark,
His maiming and his bars,
Then turned to see
His vatic shadow cast athwart the stars,
And his strange challenge to infinity.

But who am I to speak,
Far down the mountain, of its altar-peak,
Or cross on feeble wings,
Adventurous, the oceans in thy mind?
We of a wider day's bewilderings
For very light seem blind,
And fearful of the gods our hands have formed.
Some lift their eyes and seem
To see at last the lofty human scheme
Fading and toppling as a sunset stormed

By wind and evening, with the stars in doubt.
And some cry, *"On to Brotherhood!"* And some,
(Their Dream's high music dumb):
"Nay! let us hide in roses all our chains,
Tho all the lamps go out!
Let us accept our lords!
Time's tensions move not save to subtler pains."
And over all the Silence is as swords. . . .
Wherefore be near us in our day of choice,
Lest Hell's red choirs rejoice;
And may our counsels be
More wise, more kindly, for the thought of thee;
And may our deeds attest
Thy covenant of fame
To men of after-years that see thy name
Held like a flower by Honor to her breast.
Thy station in our hearts long since was won—
Safe from the jealous years—
Thou of whose love, thou of whose thews and tears
We rest most certain when the day is done
And formless shadows close upon the sun!
Thou wast a star ere death's long night shut down,
And for thy brows the crown

Was graven ere the birth-pangs, and thy bed
Is now of hallowed marble, and a fane
Among the mightier dead:
More blameless than thine own what soul has stood?
Dost thou lie deaf until another Reign,
Or hear as music o'er thy head
The ceaseless trumpets of the war for Good?
Ah, thou! ah, thou!
Stills God thy question now?

THE HOUSE OF ORCHIDS

Dedicated to Mrs. Joseph B. Coryell

How swift a step from zone to zone!
A moment since, the day
Was cool with winds from linden-bowers flown
And breath of mounded hay
That ripens on the plains,
Within the shadow of the western hill;
But here the air is still,
Warm as a Lesbian valley's afternoon
Made languorous with June
And moist with spirits of unnumbered rains,
Pervaded with a perfume that might be
Of rainbow-haunted lands beyond the sea
And ocean-ending sands—
A ghost of fragrance whose elusive hands
Touch not the hidden harp of memory.

What sprites are those that gleam?
Can eyes betray?
Till now I did not deem
That Beauty's flaming hands could shape in bloom

So marvelous and delicate designs.
The vision here that shines
Seems not a fabric of our mortal day
And Nature's tireless loom,
By custom long defiled,
But symbol of a loveliness supreme,
A god's forgotten dream,
In alabaster told by elfin skill
In caverns underneath a haunted hill,
Or in some palace of enchantment hewn
From crystal in the twilights of the moon,
Where white Astarte strays
And Echo and the silver-footed fays
Make alien music, fugitive and wild.
Ye seem as flowers exiled,
More beautiful because they die so soon;
But who the gods that could have scorned
Your tenderness unmarred?
Put first ye forth your fragile wings,
Less of the form than of the soul of things,
Where seraphim had mourned
In Eden's evening, heavy-starred,
When first the gates were barred

And cruel Time began?
For mystery has lordship here, and ye
Seem spirit-flowers born to startle man
With intimations of eternity
And hint of what the flowers of Heaven may be.
Nor can your glamour greatly seem of earth:
Her blossoms are of mirth,
But ye with loveliness can tell of grief—
Unhappy love most exquisite and brief.

Wingéd ye seem and fleet,
Such flowers pale as are
Worn by the goddess of a distant star—
Before whose holy eyes
Beauty and evening meet,
Mysterious beauty delicate and strange,
And evening-calm that sighs
With Music's inexpressible surmise—
Her question ere she dies.
From form to form ye range,
From hue to hue,
And this, with petals wan and mystical,
Seems votive to those spirits of the dew

That weep at silvern twilights silently,
With tears that gently fall
On hidden elves dim-curtained by the rose.
And thou, thy chalice better glows
In purple grottos where the stainless sea
On sands inviolable swirls—
On evanescent pearls,
That hold not all thy bosom's purity.

And thou, more white
Than when on some blue lake,
Just as the zephyrs wake,
The ripples flash to light—
Touched by a swan's unsullied breast to foam,
Hadst thou in melancholy halls thy home?
For long ago thou seemest to have slept,
Forlorn, in palace-glooms where queens have wept.
Ah! they too slept at last,
Whose sighs are half the music of the Past!

But thou, O palest one!
Dost seem to scorn the sun,
And, in a tropic, dense,

Languid magnificence,
Desire to know thy former place,
Where no man comes at night,
And in its antic flight
Behold the vampire-bat veer off from thee
As from a phantom face,
Or watch Antares' light peer craftily
Down from the dank and moonless sky,
As goblins' eyes might gleam
Or baleful rubies glare,
Muffled in smoke or incense-laden air.
And thou, most weird companion, thou dost seem
Some mottled moth of Hell,
That stealthily might fly
To hover there above the carnal bell
Of some black lily, still and venomous,
And poise forever thus.

Chill, in thy drowsy aether warm,
Softly thou gleamest, subtler form;
Witch-bloom thou seem'st to be,
For Lilith would have bound thee in her hair—
Smiling at dusk inscrutably,

And Circe gathered such for gods to wear,
In evenings when the moon,
A sorceress who steals in white
Along the cloudy parapets of night,
In every glade her ghostly pearl has strewn.
Thou art as violet-wan
As eyelids of a vestal dead and meek.
If after-life can come to blossoms gone,
Surely Persephone
Shall crown her brow with thee,
In realms where burns nor star nor sun
To show the dead what amaranths to seek.
And ah—this other! none
Of all thy kin more purely is arrayed—
Pallid as Aphrodite's cheek,
To some long passion-swoon betrayed,
By ecstasy foretold;
Yet as with blood thy bosom gleams;
Red as Adonis' wound it seems,
By Syria mourned of old,
Or scarlet lips that drink from bowls of jade,
Slowly, an ivory poison, sweet and cold. . . .

Oh! mystically strange
That speechless things should so have power to hint,
With subtle form and tint
That seize the heart's high memories unaware,
The sorrow and the mystery of Change,
And elements in Fate's controlling plan
Not altogether ministrant to man
Nor mindful of his care—
Some joy to death akin,
Or tragic kiss, or fruit malignly fair,
Some garden built by Sin
For Love to wander in,
Some face whose beauty bids the heart despair!
And yet, O blossoms pure!
How marvelous the lure
Of your fragility and innocence—
This grace and wistfulness of helpless things
That ask no recompense!
Ye give the spirit wings,
For yours the beauty that is near to pain,
And stir the heart again
With visions of the Flowers that abide—

Ah! sweet
As when love's glances meet
Across the music, heard at eventide!

A WINE OF WIZARDRY

"When mountains were stained as with wine
By the dawning of Time, and as wine
Were the seas." AMBROSE BIERCE.

Without, the battlements of sunset shine,
'Mid domes the sea-winds rear and overwhelm.
Into a crystal cup the dusky wine
I pour, and, musing at so rich a shrine,
I watch the star that haunts its ruddy gloom.
Now Fancy, empress of a purpled realm,
Awakes with brow caressed by poppy-bloom,
And wings in sudden dalliance her flight
To strands where opals of the shattered light
Gleam in the wind-strewn foam, and maidens flee
A little past the striving billows' reach,
Or seek the russet mosses of the sea,
And wrinkled shells that lure along the beach,
And please the heart of Fancy; yet she turns,
Tho trembling, to a grotto rosy-sparred,
Where wattled monsters redly gape, that guard
A cowled magician peering on the damned

Through vials in which a splendid poison burns,
Sifting Satanic gules athwart his brow.
So Fancy will not gaze with him, and now
She wanders to an iceberg oriflammed
With rayed, auroral guidons of the North—
Where arctic elves have hidden wintry gems
And treasuries of frozen anadems,
Alight with timid sapphires of the snow.
But she would dream of warmer gems, and so
Ere long her eyes in fastnesses look forth
O'er blue profounds mysterious whence glow
The coals of Tartarus on the moonless air,
As Titans plan to storm Olympus' throne,
'Mid pulse of dungeoned forges down the stunned,
Undominated firmament, and glare
Of Cyclopean furnaces unsunned.

Then hastens she in refuge to a lone,
Immortal garden of the eastern hours,
Where Dawn upon a pansy's breast has laid
A single tear, and whence the wind has flown
And left a silence. Far on shadowy tow'rs
Droop blazoned banners, and the woodland shade,

With leafy flames and dyes autumnal hung,
Makes beautiful the twilight of the year.
For this the fays will dance, for elfin cheer,
Within a dell where some mad girl has flung
A bracelet that the painted lizards fear—
Red pyres of muffled light! Yet Fancy spurns
The revel, and to eastward hazard turns,
And glaring beacons of the Soldan's shores,
When in a Syrian treasure-house she pours,
From caskets rich and amethystine urns,
Dull fires of dusty jewels that have bound
The brows of naked Ashtaroth around.
Or hushed, at fall of some disastrous night,
When sunset, like a crimson throat to Hell,
Is cavernous, she marks the seaward flight
Of homing dragons dark upon the West;
Till, drawn by tales the winds of ocean tell,
And mute amid the splendors of her quest,
To some red city of the Djinns she flees
And, lost in palaces of silence, sees
Within a porphyry crypt the murderous light
Of garnet-crusted lamps whereunder sit
Perturbéd men that tremble at a sound,

And ponder words on ghastly vellum writ,
In vipers' blood, to whispers from the night—
Infernal rubrics, sung to Satan's might,
Or chaunted to the Dragon in his gyre.
But she would blot from memory the sight,
And seeks a stainéd twilight of the South,
Where crafty gnomes with scarlet eyes conspire
To quench Aldebaran's affronting fire,
Low sparkling just beyond their cavern's mouth,
Above a wicked queen's unhallowed tomb.
There lichens brown, incredulous of fame,
Whisper to veinéd flowers her body's shame,
'Mid stillness of all pageantries of bloom.
Within, lurk orbs that graven monsters clasp;
Red-embered rubies smolder in the gloom,
Betrayed by lamps that nurse a sullen flame,
And livid roots writhe in the marble's grasp,
As moaning airs invoke the conquered rust
Of lordly helms made equal in the dust.
Without, where baleful cypresses make rich
The bleeding sun's phantasmagoric gules,
Are fungus-tapers of the twilight witch
(Seen by the bat above unfathomed pools)

And tiger-lilies known to silent ghouls,
Whose king has digged a somber carcanet
And necklaces with fevered opals set.
But Fancy, well affrighted at his gaze,
Flies to a violet headland of the West,
About whose base the sun-lashed billows blaze,
Ending in precious foam their fatal quest,
As far below the deep-hued ocean molds,
With waters' toil and polished pebbles' fret,
The tiny twilight in the jacinth set,
The wintry orb the moonstone-crystal holds.
Snapt coral twigs and winy agates wet,
Translucencies of jasper, and the folds
Of banded onyx, and vermilion breast
Of cinnabar. Anear on orange sands,
With prows of bronze the sea-stained galleys rest,
And swarthy mariners from alien strands
Stare at the red horizon, for their eyes
Behold a beacon burn on evening skies,
As fed with sanguine oils at touch of night.
Forth from that pharos-flame a radiance flies,
To spill in vinous gleams on ruddy decks;

And overside, when leap the startled waves
And crimson bubbles rise from battle-wrecks,
Unresting hydras wrought of bloody light
Dip to the ocean's phosphorescent caves.

So Fancy's carvel seeks an isle afar,
Led by the Scorpion's rubescent star,
Until in templed zones she smiles to see
Black incense glow, and scarlet-bellied snakes
Sway to the tawny flutes of sorcery.
There priestesses in purple robes hold each
A sultry garnet to the sea-linkt sun,
Or, just before the colored morning shakes
A splendor on the ruby-sanded beach,
Cry unto Betelgeuse a mystic word.
But Fancy, amorous of evening, takes
Her flight to groves whence lustrous rivers run,
Thro hyacinth, a minister wall to gird,
Where, in the hushed cathedral's jeweled gloom,
Ere Faith return, and azure censers fume,
She kneels, in solemn quietude, to mark
The suppliant day from gorgeous oriels float

And altar-lamps immure the deathless spark;
Till, all her dreams made rich with fervent hues,
She goes to watch, beside a lurid moat,
The kingdoms of the afterglow suffuse
A sentinel mountain stationed toward the night—
Whose broken tombs betray their ghastly trust,
Till bloodshot gems stare up like eyes of lust.
And now she knows, at agate portals bright,
How Circe and her poisons have a home,
Carved in one ruby that a Titan lost,
Where icy philters brim with scarlet foam,
'Mid hiss of oils in burnished caldrons tost,
While thickly from her prey his life-tide drips,
In turbid dyes that tinge her torture-dome,
As craftily she gleans her deadly dews,
With gyving spells not Pluto's queen can use,
Or listens to her victim's moan, and sips
Her darkest wine, and smiles with wicked lips.
Nor comes a god with any power to break
The red alembics whence her gleaming broths
Obscenely fume, as asp or adder froths,
To lethal mists whose writhing vapors make
Dim augury, till shapes of men that were

Point, weeping, at tremendous dooms to be,
When pillared pomps and thrones supreme shall stir,
Unstable as the foam-dreams of the sea.

But Fancy still is fugitive, and turns
To caverns where a demon altar burns,
And Satan, yawning on his brazen seat,
Fondles a screaming thing his fiends have flayed,
Ere Lilith come his indolence to greet,
Who leads from Hell his whitest queens, arrayed
In chains so heated at their master's fire
That one new-damned had thought their bright attire
Indeed were coral, till the dazzling dance
So terribly that brilliance shall enhance.
But Fancy is unsatisfied, and soon
She seeks the silence of a vaster night,
Where powers of wizardry, with faltering sight
(Whenas the hours creep farthest from the noon)
Seek by the glow-worm's lantern cold and dull
A crimson spider hidden in a skull,
Or search for mottled vines with berries white,

Where waters mutter to the gibbous moon.
There, clothed in cerements of malignant light,
A sick enchantress scans the dark to curse,
Beside a caldron vext with harlots' blood,
The stars of that red Sign which spells her doom.

Then Fancy cleaves the palmy skies adverse
To sunset barriers. By the Ganges' flood,
She sees, in her dim temple, Siva loom
And, visioned with a monstrous ruby, glare
On distant twilight where the burning-ghaut
Is lit with glowering pyres that seem the eyes
Of her abhorrent dragon-worms that bear
The pestilence, by Death in darkness wrought.
So Fancy's wings forsake the Asian skies,
And now her heart is curious of halls
In which dead Merlin's prowling ape has spilt
A vial squat whose scarlet venom crawls
To ciphers bright and terrible, that tell
The sins of demons and the encharneled guilt
That breathes a phantom at whose cry the owl,
Malignly mute above the midnight well,
Is dolorous, and Hecate lifts her cowl

To mutter swift a minatory rune;
And, ere the tomb-thrown echoings have ceased,
The blue-eyed vampire, sated at her feast,
Smiles bloodily against the leprous moon.

But evening now is come, and Fancy folds
Her splendid plumes, nor any longer holds
Adventurous quest o'er stainéd lands and seas—
Fled to a star above the sunset lees,
O'er onyx waters stilled by gorgeous oils
That toward the twilight reach emblazoned coils.
And I, albeit Merlin-sage has said,
"A vyper lurketh in ye wine-cuppe redde,"
Gaze pensively upon the way she went,
Drink at her font, and smile as one content.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SUNS

To Whom the unceasing suns belong,
And cause is one with consequence,—
To Whose divine inclusive sense
The moan is blended with the song.

—Ambrose Bierce.

I

The heavens darken in the North. . . .
The light deserts the quiet sky. . . .
From their far gates how silently
The stars of evening tremble forth!

Time, to thy sight what peace they share
On Night's inviolable breast!
Remote in solitudes of rest,
Afar from human change or care.

Eternity, unto thine eyes,
In war's unrest their legions surge,
Foam of the cosmic tides that urge
The battle of contending skies,

The war whose waves of onslaught, met
  Where night's abysses storm afar,
  Break on the high, tremendous bar
Athwart that central ocean set—

From seas whose cyclic ebb and sweep,
  Unseen to Life's oblivious hours,
  Are ostent of the changeless Pow'rs
That hold dominion of the Deep.

O armies of eternal night,
  How flame your guidons on the dark!
  Silent we turn from Time to hark
What final Orders sway your might.

Cold from colossal ramparts gleam,
  At their insuperable posts,
  The seven princes of the hosts
Who guard the holy North supreme;

Who watch the phalanxes remote
That, gathered in opposing skies,
Far on the southern wastes arise,
Marshalled by flaming Fomalhaut.

Altair, what captains compass thee?
What foes, Aldebaran, are thine?
Red with what blood of wars divine
Glows that immortal panoply?

What music from Capella runs?
How hold the Pleiades their bond?
How storms the hidden war beyond
Orion's dreadful sword of suns?

When, on what hostile firmament,
Shall stars unnamed contend our gyre,
'Mid councils of Boötes' fire,
Or night of Vega's fury spent?

What tidings of the heavenly fray?
  These, as our sages nightward turn,
  To gaze within the gulfs where burn
The helms of that sublime array:

Splendors of elemental strife;
  Smit suns that startle back the gloom;
  New light whose tale of stellar doom
Fares to uncomprehending life;

Profounds of fire whose maelstroms froth
  To gathered armies of offense;
  Cohorts unweariable, immense,
And bulks wherewith the Dark is wroth;

Reserves and urgencies of light
  That flame upon the battle's path,
  And banding suns that brave the wrath
Of systems leagued athwart the night;

Menace of silent ranks that sweep
  Unto irrevocable wars,
  And onset of titanic cars
In Armageddons of the Deep!

Dream we their enginery was not,
  Far in the dim, eternal past?
  Dream we eternity at last
Will find their thunders unbegot?

How haste the unresting feet of Change,
  On life's stupendous orbit set!
  She walks a way her blood has wet,
Yet thinks her path untrodden, strange.

By night's immeasurable dome
  She dreams her hopes in surety held—
  Lo! from insurgent deeps impelled
The fleeting systems lapse like foam.

Unshared she thinks the kindred skies;
  But runic gulf and star proclaim
  (Archival gloom, prophetic flame)
The immutable infinities:

Vague on the night the mist we mark
  That tells where met the random suns:
  In changeless molds of law it runs
To orbs that roam anew the dark,

And unto which the worlds are born,
  Where Life awakes to know again
  The light of stars, caress of rain,
And winds of the forgotten morn.

Lift up, ye everlasting gates
  Whence fare her feet to wars unknown,
  To heights august of Reason's throne,
And heritage of ampler Fates!

When she, the mindless clay no more
  In Lust's or Fear's potential hands,
  Shall range her uncontested lands
Or sister world's befriending shore.

Till lapse her beatific years
  In emperies of art untold,
  The music of her age of gold.
Requiting for unnumbered tears;

Till she behold—the visual boon
  Surviving elemental risk—
  The nearing sun's enormous disc,
Blood-red at dusk of sullen noon;

Till her appointed course be run;
  Till on the darkness faint her breath,
  Flown to the silent void, and Death
Sit crowned upon the ashen sun.

Till sun and sun be met at last,
  In warfare that annuls the night,
  When sea and mountain start to light,
Pyres of the sacrificial past,

Dim veils of fire, O world! that were
  The stubborn bastions of thy frame,
  And reaches of abysmal flame
Wherein thy spectral oceans stir—

A mist upon the vassal skies
  Gyrant to Betelgeuse—a flare
  Upon the midnights round Altair—
A portent to barbaric eyes.

O dread and strong Eternity!
  Prickt in an instant of thy clime,
The bubble of Antares' time
  Is one with thine unchanging sea.

Ever the star, unstable, frames
  Her transitory throne of fire,
  But in thy sight how soon expire,
How soon recur, the inviolate flames!—

Throbs of the fitful sun that are
  Unto thine amplitude of sight,
  Even as the quick unrest of light
That stirs, to mortal sense, the star.

What silence rules the ghostly hours
  That guard the close of human sleep!
  Aldebaran crowns the western deep;
Belted with suns Orion tow'rs,

And greaved with light of worlds destroyed,
  And girt with firmamental gloom,
  Abides his far, portended doom
And menace of the warring void.

Shall night allay his high unrest?
  Shall Time his destinies aver,
  Or darkened vastitude deter
His feet from their immortal quest?

Shall augury his goal impart,
  Or mind his hidden steps retrace
  To mausolean pits of space
Where throbs the Hydra's crimson heart?

Ephemeral, may Life declare
  What quarry from the Lion runs,
  And sway the inexorable suns
Where gape the abysses of his lair?

O Night, what legions serve thy wars!
  Lo! thy terrific battle-line—
  The rayless bulk, the blazing Sign,
The leagued infinity of stars!

Remote they burn whose dread array
  Glows from the dark a dust of fire;
  Unheard the storm of Rigel's ire,
A grain of light Arcturus' day.

Unheard their antiphon of death
  Who gleam Capella's cosmic foes;
  Unseen the war whose causal throes
Perturb gigantic Algol's breath—

Whom from afar we mete and name,
  Ere Light and Life their doom fulfill,
  Spawn of the Power whose æons still
The suns of Taurus armed with flame.

What sound shall pass the gulfs where groan
  Their sullen axles on the night?
  What thunder from the strands of light
Whence Vega glares on worlds unknown?

O Deep whose very silence stuns!
  Where Light is powerless to illume,
  Lost in immensities of gloom
That dwarf to motes the flaring suns.

O Night where Time and Sorrow cease!
  Eternal magnitude of dark
  Wherein Aldebaran drifts a spark,
And Sirius is hushed to peace!

O Tides that foam on strands untrod,
  From seas in everlasting prime,
  To light where Life looks forth on Time,
And Pain, unanswered, questions God!

What Power, with inclusive sweep
  And rigor of compelling bars,
  Shall curb the furies of the stars,
And still the troubling of that Deep?

What will shall calm that wrathful sky?
  Crave ye tranquillities of light,
  Who stand the sons of war and night?
Behold! the Abyss has given reply.

Wards of Whose realm shall ye avail
  To loose the tentacles of force
  That drag Arcturus from his course,
And rend the weight of Procyon's mail?

Shall yet your feet essay, unharmed,
  The glare of cosmic leaguers met
  Round stellar strongholds gulfward set,
With night and fire supremely armed?

Shall sun or cycle yet confirm
  Your lordship to the unceded Vast,
  Or human period outlast
The vigil of Capella's term?

Deem ye the Eternal Mind will change
  The throned infinity of law
  That never æon altered saw
In all the Past's eternal range?

Child of unrest, but fain for peace,
  Life dreams, in her expectant dark,
  Of final things, and waits to hark
Conclusive trumpets crying cease.

She lifts an alien voice to call
  To near Denebola: "O sun!
  A little, and thy day is done,
A little, and the Night is all."

A little, and his rays, far-flown,
  Gleam in the dews upon her grave,
  The storied pomps her epochs gave
A dust within her deserts lone.

Yea! so shall Life on worlds afar
  Muse idly of a cosmic tomb,
  Where now past Alioth the gloom
Stirs not with her awaited star.

Her fate, how stranger than we deem!
  Tho Faith behold with trusting eyes
  A vision on transmuted skies—
The splendors of the human dream;

To live, tho Pain and Sorrow cease;
  To reach the high Eternal Heart;
  To know Infinity, nor part;
To find the far Ideal, Peace—

The life of each perfected world
  August archangels chanting praise,
  Deep-ranked in everlasting ways,
With wings of grief and exile furled.

O dream not all the worlds fulfill!
  Unblest, unbidden, save of hope.
  Not for finality the scope
And strength of that unaltered Will.

The eternal Night has writ in stars
  Denial of the ends ye name;
  Ye stand rebuked by suns who claim
The consummation of her wars.

Constrained to what abysmal pole
  Shall severed armies close their flanks
  To stand with deviated ranks,
Subserving to a final goal?

Shall Godhead dream a transient thing?
  Strives He for that which now He lacks?
  Shall Law's dominion melt as wax
At touch of Hope's irradiant wing?

Are these the towers His hands have wrought?
  Dreams He the dream of end and plan
  Dear to the finity of man,
And shall mutation rule His thought?

What powers throng the pregnant gloom!
  Unseen, the ministers of Law
  Reach from eternity to draw
The suns to predetermined doom.

On Law ye serve with kindred might,
  Atom and world that hold her ways;
  The firefly's mote, the comet's blaze,
Are equal in her perfect sight.

Her bonds compel the Vast where boils
  Intensest Spica's sea of fire;
  Her lips decree the hidden gyre
Of bulks that strain in Algol's toils.

Subject to Law's resistless word,
  Thy hands, O Force! resolve the star,
  And toil, at Alphard's battle-car,
His flaming panoply to gird.

Charged, the immeasured gulfs transmit
  Her mandate to the fonts of life,
  Inciting to the governed strife
Whereby the lethal voids are lit,

With augment of imperious tides
  On vague, illimitable coasts,
  And battle-haze of merging hosts
To which the flare of Vega rides.

"But nay!" ye cry, "we trust her hands
  Induce an unconjectured morn,
  To whose divine fulfillment born,
Her strength irrevocable stands."

O lights by which, far-taught, we trace
  The path of Life from death to death!
  O fanes of her recurrent breath,
And strength of Night's annulling mace!—

Profounds whose silences proclaim
  What realms of mystery and awe!
  Colossal Wraths extolling Law
From unsubverted thrones of flame!—

Suns of the Lyre whose thunders rise
  From chords the eternal Hands have smit!
  Stars of the Sword a moment lit
Ere Life re-name her altered skies!—

Without beginning, aim or end;
  Supreme, incessant, unbegot;
  The systems change, but goal is not,
Where the Infinities attend.

Deem ye their armaments confess
A source of mutable desire?
Think ye He mailed His thought in fire
And called from night and nothingness

And armed for Time their high array?
Dream ye Infinity was bent
Upon a whim, a drama spent
Within an instant of His day?

Think ye He broke His dream indeed,
And rent His deep with fearful Pow'rs,
That Man inherit fadeless bow'rs?
Desiring, He would know a need!

Nay! stable His Infinity,
Beyond mutation or desire.
The visions pass. The worlds expire,
Unfathomed still their mystery.

So has He dreamt. So stands His night
  Wherein the suns abiding range,
  Dust of the dynasties of Change,
And altars of eternal light.

II

My sleep was like a summer sky
  That held the music of a lark:
  I waken to the voiceless dark
And life's more silent mystery.

Night with her fleeting hours, how brief
  To watch beyond her vault sublime
  The gyrant systems meting Time,
That holds the timelessness of grief!

How pure the light their legions shed!
  How calm above the crumbling tomb
  Of race and epoch passed to gloom
No ray can pierce nor mortal tread!

What gulfs define the cosmic storm!
  The torrent of Capella's light
  A needle on the nerves of sight,
Till Force annul the bonds of form;

Till Alcor vanish from the void
  Wherein the Dragon dares the waste,
  Wherein the spawn of Alioth haste
To ghostly bastions long destroyed.

O nearer dark whence Man descries
  Abyssal lamps that flare and sink!
  Profounds where stellar glories shrink,
Or Betelgeuse relumined flies!

In gloom as dense can Spica grope
  As this that bars the human will?
  Desires as vast her children fill,
Or kindred mystery and hope?

Lo! peaceless, ere the veiling day
  Expand where now Arcturus shines,
  I cry to night's ascendant Signs
The timeless questions of the clay:

Will Life, the bourne eternal crossed,
  Attain the secret of her hours?
  Will Sorrow find atoning Pow'rs,
And Love fare heavenward to her lost?

I lift entreating eyes to see
  Gulf beyond gulf till sight relent,
  Sun beyond sun till Time repent
Its question of Infinity.

Shall voice or vision cross the night
  From glooms where grope the hands of Force,
  On law's inexorable course,
To being's transitory light?

Shall Sirius resolve our fears?
  Shall Vega's Lord command the Lyre
  To scatter from her chords of fire
A music on the mortal years?

Shall Procyon with flaming tongue
  Declare the doom his strength awaits,
  Or Rigel's light reveal the Fates
Whereto his shadowed worlds have sung?

O silence of the changeless dark
  Whence Hope uplifts unwearied eyes!
  O patience of devouring skies
That close on Algol's dying spark!

Enhooved with gloom, the Age stamps down
  The palace-flare of Babylon;
  To night the lords of Ur are gone;
The Tyres of Time put by the crown.

To Death the sons of Life are thrust;
  From night to night the nations pace;
  Empire by empire, race by race,
The generations pass to dust.

Enter, O Life! their place of dread,
  And seek their silence to attain:
  Shall Mystery renounce her reign,
Or darkness render thee thy dead?

Where stirs the energy they knew?
  Joins it the forces undestroyed
  That urge the suns within the void,
And shake the star in evening's dew?

Or sit they girt by laws unknown,
  Whereto the senses serve as bars—
  With fire of unrecorded stars
That light a heaven not our own?

The Night inevitable waits
  Till fails the insufficient sun,
  And darkness ends the toil begun
By Chaos and the morning Fates;

And starward drifts the stricken world,
  Lone in unalterable gloom,
  Dead, with a universe for tomb,
Dark, and to vaster darkness whirled.

How dread thy reign, O Silence, there!
  A little, and the deeps are dumb—
  Lo! thine eternal feet are come
Where trod the thunders of Altair.

O ashen bulks that haunt the Vast,
  Beyond the ministry of Light!
  O strong intrenchment of the Night
On charred Antares cold at last!

Eternity! thine awful hands
  Shall blot the Lion from our skies,
  And build thy dark for future eyes
Where now illumed Orion stands.

Forever, infinite of range,
  Unceasing whirls the cosmic storm,
  In changeless gulfs where Force and Form
Renew the mystery of Change.

A fleeting moment, to thy sight,
  Lamp of thine altar Alphard burns;
  Aldebaran to dusk returns,
And Betelgeuse is stone and night. . . .

What solitudes of gloom unknown
  Abide, O Sun! thy future ways,
  Ere Light at last a sceptre raise,
Resuming her forsaken throne—

When Law's compulsive angels sweep
  A sun unknown athwart thy path;
  When hands resistless wake the wrath
That smites to flame the boiling Deep!

And sprung from that recurrent storm,
  The youthful world exultant wheels,
  Where slow Eternity anneals
The manacles of Time and Form;

Where dim alchemic powers rebuild,
  To Law's immutable designs,
  The primal, unapparent shrines
With Being's basic mystery filled—

Fanes of the slowly fostered spark
  Whose fire shall light the groping clay
  To Reason's sympathetic day
And refuge from the bestial dark.

Reborn to that selective strife
  And fury of ascendant wars,
  What tidings of the immortal shores?
What covenant from Death, O Life?

When, in what maze of spacial bound,
  Or cryptic glooms that wall the grave,
  Hast heard the secret which we crave
From that inscrutable Profound?

What surety that thy sons attain
  The litten council of thy Lords,
  And thunder of seraphic chords
To music not of Time and Pain?

What whisper from the world new-born
  Recalled thy footsteps to essay
  The far, inevitable way
Lit sunward from thy mists of morn?

Nay! were Oblivion's nightward springs
So fair to thine enchanted eyes
That now forgot the message lies
From Mystery's reluctant kings?

Nay! are thy lips forever sealed,
O thou that stoodst aloof with Death—
Thou that with unrevealing breath
Hast passed the swords his angels wield?

She standeth mute. She cannot say
(Ah! dumb to Love's appealing Deep!)
If Death be suzerain of Sleep,
Or Lethe cross the road to Day.

She cannot say if she in sooth
Abide Infinity's concern,
Tho Time's unanswered altars burn
In question to the final Truth.

And yet from unaccording Fates
We crave the secret of our tears,
With trust in the betraying years,
And clamor at relentless gates.

And lost within the glooms that fill
The Night's primordial realm unknown,
See Mystery on a vaster throne
And Truth's far face receding still.

Shall yet the fearful answer fare
To ancient life supremely wise,
By seas that flash on alien eyes
The riven sunlight of Altair?

Athwart the gulfs of mote and mind,
How vast, to Sense, the shadow falls!
She gazes from her proven walls
What deeps unfathomable to find!

Lo! wearied with the fruitless quest
  Their shores invisible to mark,
  We turn us to the outer Dark,
And gleaming suns far-manifest.

Night! of the dooms to which they sweep
  What rumor from the battle's verge,
  Where sun and sun their chariots urge
To leaguers of the hostile Deep?

O Space and Time and stars at strife,
  How dreadful your infinity!
  Shrined by your termless trinity,
How strange, how terrible, is life!

How dark to Being's baffled glance
  The pits of night and nothingness,
  Where manacled in Law's duress
The allegiant Pleiades advance!

Behold! her little sight is drawn
  By Hope's untold, immortal ray;
  Debarred, she seeks atoning day;
Beyond her gloom she dreams a dawn.

Thy secret, O profound of stars!
  We, born of darkness, dare to seek,
  Adjuring Rigel that he speak
His tidings of the eternal wars.

Capella! past thy lonely light
  What Guardians rule the changeless void?
  What final Eden undestroyed
Where seethe the caldrons of the night?—

Where, on the path of suns far-fled,
  Aldebaran goes forth to doom;
  Where unto night's tremendous tomb
The worlds of Procyon are led.

Ere yet below our sky-line dip
  Thy sun-crowned spars to deeps unknown,
  Ere yet our pharos-light be flown,
Declare thy cosmic port, O Ship!

Arcturus! from the abysses vast
  That hush the Voices of thy strife,
  Hast heard a whisper unto Life,
Assuring that she rest at last?

Crave ye a truce, O suns supreme?
  What order shall ye deign to hark,
  Enormous shuttles of the dark!
That weave the Everlasting Dream?

Shall Sirius light the gulfs untrod
  That bar, O Life! thy claimant gaze?
  Shall Betelgeuse attend thy ways,
Or Alphard guide thy feet to God?

Shall lone Antares whisper thee
  His attestation to thy hope,
  Or Alioth aid the souls that grope
Within the Night's infinity?

Dost dream to hold the ghostly heights
  That soar beyond Mutation's reign,
  Or sway the tides of Time and Pain,
Lord of the war Arcturus lights?

Wouldst set the Crown upon thy brow?
  Wouldst still the Scorpion's heart of fire?
  Wouldst tread the arc of Rigel's gyre,
Or greet the God his worlds avow?

Lo! claspt to His atoning breast
  In Whom are woe and wrong made just,
  Why this regression to the dust—
This loss of certitude and rest?

What farce were that in which the soul
  Were summoned to celestial peace,
  And, ere her jubilation cease,
Dismissed to her ancestral goal?

To what emergency concealed,
  Abides the realm we seek to share,
  Which to all antecedent pray'r
Eternity has not revealed?

Has Vega's night diviner shores?
  Shall Spica with surpassing ray
  Illume her worlds with vaster day
Than that Denebola outpours?

Dim are the laws the sages give,
  For Science sees in all her lands
  Illusive twilight, in her hands
The judgments of the Relative.

Obscure the glooms that harbor Truth,
  And mute the lips from which we crave
  The guarded secret of the grave—
So soon grown dumb to word and ruth!

But ye, O suns! concede the boon
  To those whose baffled eyes aspire
  To search your syllables of fire,
And read Orion's telic rune—

The boon to know that Life abides
  One with your immortality,
  One with your changing mystery,
And foam of your eternal tides.

Exalt, Infinity, thy might,
  Nor deem their decrement to mark.
  Spread thou their ashes on the dark:
Behold! they leap again to light—

To light that summons Life to wake,
And stirred from consummated sleep
In matter's unconjectured deep,
From mire to mind the pathway take,

The pathway traced with blood and tears,
And dust of all our fathers dead,
Whose backward footsteps, wandering, red,
Fade to the mist of nameless years.

How oft, O Life, on worlds forgot,
Hast thou, in thine unnumbered forms,
Gone forth to Time's transmuting storms,
And fought till storm and stress were not!

How oft hast striven, hoped, and died,
And, dying, fared to gracious rest,
The Night's inevitable guest,
In alien realms unverified!

How oft to Mystery and Time
  Returned, their ancient ways to hold,
  With lips that never yet have told
The tidings of that distant clime—

With little hands that could not keep
  The mighty message of the Night,
  Nor bare to Day's appealing sight
The hidden annals of thy sleep.

Dost deem the eternity to come
  The secret will disclose at last
  Whereunto an eternal past
Held lips to revelation dumb?

How vast the gulfs of man's desire!
  Children of Change, we dream to share
  The battle-vigil of Altair,
And watch great Fomalhaut expire;

To live, where darkened suns relume
  Their kingdoms in the abysmal haze—
  Where nearing Night attends the blaze
Of high Antares red with doom;

To hear within the deep of Law
  The Word that moves her causal tides;
  To know what Permanence abides
Beyond the veil the senses draw.

And such the hope that fills thy heart,
  O Life! on some allegiant world
  Round Procyon's throne of thunder whirled,
Or poised in Spica's gulf apart.

So dreamt thy sons on worlds destroyed,
  Whose dust allures our careless eyes,
  As, lit at last on alien skies,
The meteor melts athwart the void.

So shall thy seed on worlds to be,
  At altars built to suns afar,
  Crave from the silence of the star
Solution of thy mystery;

And crave unanswered, till, denied
  By cosmic gloom and stellar glare,
  The brains are dust that bore the pray'r,
And dust the yearning lips that cried.

THE END

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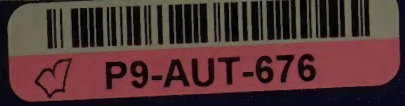
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